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THE

SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA,

OR THE

SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE SPANISH BROTHERS."

*Deborah Alcock*

Edinburgh:

T. & T. CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET.

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# THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

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## THE INTRODUCTION.

THE opening chapter of the Book of Revelation speaks of seven stars and seven golden candlesticks. In the latter we have a picture of the Church of Christ,—multiform, since there are and have been many churches, yet truly one in Him. During the interval between His first coming and His second, the glorified Christ is really, though invisibly, present in His Church, “walking in the midst of the candlesticks,” as the High Priest, tending the lamps. The Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia shew His intimate and perfect knowledge,—not only of each particular church,—but of each individual composing it. The promises, encouragements, exhortations, reproofs, and warnings they contain, are to be regarded as addressed by Him from His place at the right hand of the Father to the members of His Church on earth: whose care it should be to discern and to apply the intended lesson. Thus shall all be ready for that Appearing to which, throughout the New Testament, and especially in this its concluding book, our thoughts are so continually directed.

1. **Title and Preface**—(Rev. i. 1, 2. See also 1 Peter i. 12; 1 John i. 3). The first three chapters of this book stand by themselves, and may almost be taken as a distinct section of Scripture. They

also form an introduction to the last book of Scripture, according to the order in which the books are placed in our Bibles. Very wonderful is the unity in diversity which is seen in these books. We have a series of writings, in number altogether sixty-six, penned at different periods extending over more than 1500 years. "All sorts and conditions of men" are amongst the writers ;—kings, statesmen, poets, prophets, priests, simple husbandmen and fisher folk, a tax-collector, and a physician. Equally various are the styles employed. We have the most imaginative poetry, and the simplest narrative ; we have even pages of dry genealogy, and lists of names. Nor are the subjects less diversified. Of this divine Book it may be truly said, that in virtue of its intense humanity "nothing human is alien" to it. Every phase of man's infinitely diversified life on earth comes in for its share of notice and description. Yet this variety only throws out and illustrates a unity still more wonderful. One purpose, the impress of one mind, the touch of one creative and informing hand, runs throughout all. As really as in any human work of art, and far more perfectly, one design, one thought pervades the whole. There is a beginning, a gradual development, an end answering to and completing the beginning ; and the end and the beginning meet and clasp, forming a perfect circle, a grand and finished whole. The first book in our canonical Scriptures is connected with the name of the prophet whom the Lord knew face to face (Deut. xxxiv. 10). The last is penned by the disciple whom the Lord loved, and who lay upon His breast (John xiii. 23). The first tells the story of creation, the last the more wonderful story of the new creation (Rev. xxi.). The first introduces us to the Garden of Eden, the earthly paradise ; the last to the Paradise of God. The first tells of the tree of life which grew in the midst of the garden ; in the last we meet the tree of life

again in the midst of the holy city, and they who enter have the right to eat of it for evermore. Between the two lies the great story of the Book ; the story of Paradise lost and regained, of life and blessing forfeited by man, and restored in far higher measure and more glorious kind,—not only *for* man, but *by* man (1 Cor. xv. 22 ; Rom. v. 12, 18, 19, 21). The Epistles to the Seven Churches, which occupy the second and third chapters of the last book of the Bible, have the first chapter as their appropriate prelude. We cannot consider *these* therefore, without first considering that exalted opening chapter which serves as an introduction at once for them, and for the wonderful prophetic visions which follow. In fact we must take the book as a whole. Its title is “the *Revelation*” (not Revelations, always remember its unity), or Apocalypse—the unveiling, the discovery, the disclosure, which may be either of hidden things, or more properly here of future things, “which must shortly come to pass.” Note, that unveilings of the future are often longed for, even passionately, by the heart of man ; but these longings, God, for the most part, and for wise and sufficient reasons, refuses to gratify, drawing a “veil” between us and those things to come which, if known, would only paralyse our energies, and bring us sorrow and confusion. When an “unveiling” is given, as in this book, it is couched in such enigmatical language as not to forestall history, or to control the development of events ; whilst for the devout and believing children of God it is as a light in a dark place, full of help and comfort.

*The revelation of Jesus Christ.* Not about Jesus Christ (though that is true also), but belonging to Jesus Christ, or made by Him, as appears from the following clause, “*which God gave unto Him.*” Why, we ask, did He need to have it given Him, since as God (and the book we are studying bears complete and glorious witness to His essential Godhead), He



necessarily possesses all knowledge? See, for explanation, Ps. lxxviii. (marg.), Eph. iv. 8, 13. *As man* He received this last gift, like other inestimable gifts, *for man*. Compare, upon the relations of the Son with the Father, the words of the same inspired penman who bears record of these things, St John v. 19, 20; vii. 16; xii. 49; xiv. 10; xvii. 7, 8.

*Which God gave unto Him.* Note the word "gave." A gift implies good will in the giver, and (usually) preciousness in the thing bestowed. Here the gift is indeed worthy of Him who gives it, the Father of glory, the Lord of heaven and earth. "*To show unto His servants,*" &c. Note each link in the chain of blessing—God the Father, the source of all; Jesus Christ, who receives the gift from Him; then the angel; then again, the "fellow-servant" John; lastly, all the servants of Christ to the end of time, including each of those whose eyes rest upon these pages. For the ministry of angels, see Hebrews i. 7, 14. Yet the angel's part, here or elsewhere, is but slightly dwelt upon, or put in evidence. It was the glorified Christ Himself who came to John with the messages for His Church, and when we look for guidance, help, or sympathy, it is *Christ Himself* we see—no veil between—not even a luminous veil of angels' wings. But the employment of the human agent is very characteristic of God's dealings with us. He loves to send His children to each other with His gifts (Eph. iv. 11, 12), because in so doing He blesses both giver and receiver; nay, He allows His ministering servants to share the *greater* blessing (Acts xx. 35), and to become fellow-workers with Him. Every good thing given to us is meant to be shared with others; every cup of blessing put into our hands bears, as it were, the legend, "pass me on." Nothing we possess is possessed for ourselves alone (1 Peter i. 12). *Verse 2, John was a competent*

witness because he saw what he told, and he was a *faithful* witness because he told what he saw (1 John i. 3). It is this personal seeing and hearing that qualify us to be witnesses for Christ. Of course we have not the prophetic messages, the glorious visions of the inspired apostle to record, yet even we, who have "seen no least of all his sights," have, if we are walking in the light, the testimony, or witness, of Jesus Christ in our own hearts (1 John v. 10), and that fellowship with Him and with the Father (1 John i. 3, 7), which makes us blessed ourselves, and the channels of blessing to others, bound to "declare that which we have seen and heard."

II. **The blessing pronounced on its students** (Rev. i. 3; 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17; Ps. ciii. 18). At the first reading of this verse a picture rises before us. The blessing pronounced so emphatically upon *him* that readeth and *those* that hear recalls bygone days, when the accomplishment of reading was rare, and one would exercise it for the benefit of many. We seem to see a parish church of the Reformation epoch, with its ponderous English Bible chained to the reading desk. An eager reader stands before it, his whole soul thrown into his work, whilst densely packed around him cluster old men and women, toil-worn labourers and little children, listening, hanging on his lips, "for the word of the Lord was precious in those days." At the time when the revelation was written by St John, books, existing only in MS., were yet scarcer than readers, and one would read and many listen, as indeed would still be the case in some parts of the world. Adapting the thought however to our time and circumstances, "he that readeth" may represent the teacher, and "they that hear" the taught. For the terms refer to "the one public reader and the many hearers" (Alford). We have thus a distinct personal blessing pronounced—first upon him (or her) who devoutly

and humbly seeks to understand this portion of God's Word, and *to impart the knowledge to others*, and then upon each and all who take its lessons to heart for their own individual benefit. No doubt all devout students of any part of the Divine Word will receive a blessing; yet it is remarkable that it should be expressly and emphatically attached to the study of a portion which we are apt to find difficult to understand, and therefore sometimes tempted to avoid or neglect. But see 2 Tim. iii. 16. "*All Scripture.*" Note, however, the significant addition, "*and keep those things that are written therein*" (Ps. ciii. 18). No knowledge is really ours that does not influence our hearts and lives (Luke viii. 18, "seemeth to have," because that which is unused and unapplied is only in appearance possessed). There is, moreover, a special danger attaching to unsanctified study of the book before us; it contains so much that is tempting and alluring to the imagination, that we seem to need a double portion of the "spirit of counsel and understanding," to keep our thoughts about it right and sober, and in accordance with the mind of God. Note the Scripture signification of the word "keep." There is first the keeping, or hiding, of the word in the heart (Ps. cxix. 11; Luke ii. 19), as the seed is hidden in the ground that it may germinate and bring forth fruit. Then there is the keeping of it in the life and conversation (Ps. cxix. 2, 5), "*remembering His commandments to do them.*" Lastly, this keeping not only implies well doing, but continuance in well doing (Ps. cxix. 33). "*For the time is at hand.*" *For* is significant here. Throughout the New Testament, and especially in this book, the coming again of our Lord is set before us as the centre of interest, and the object of hope and expectation. For this the Church is directed to "look," and all which throws light upon this she should regard with especial interest.



Blessed are those who are found watching, and who are found *ready*. They are ready who are "keeping" His word in their hearts and lives, abiding in Him, and serving Him faithfully (Luke xii. 37, 38). Not doubting, then, that the time meant here is the time of His appearing, we ask why it is said to be "at hand," when eighteen weary centuries have rolled away since then, and the Church is waiting for it still. This difficulty meets us, not here alone, but wherever the coming of the Lord is spoken of in the New Testament (compare ver. 1, also ch. xxii. 6, 10, 12, 20; Rom. xiii. 11, 12; James v. 8, 9; 1 Peter iv. 7). It has been often said in explanation that the apostles thought our Lord would come during their own life-time. Probably they did; for as men they were not infallible, still less omniscient, and we are told it was the will of God that "the times and the seasons" no man should know. But we believe that the Holy Spirit exercised over their inspired utterances such superintending care as would have prevented their placing on record anything not true, and therefore not according to the mind of God. And we can easily see how these words "shortly," "quickly," may be true, and are true, according to the Divine measurement (2 Peter iii. 8, 9). Yet this is not perhaps all that is intended here. The Church is composed of individuals; and to each individual, and therefore to the whole Church, it is emphatically true that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." For the hour of death is for each the coming of the Lord. That which constitutes preparedness for the one, constitutes also readiness for the other. And to the saints that have fallen asleep the interval may seem but as a moment until they are awakened by His call. Not, of course, that their spirits "sleep." They rest with Him in holy and conscious blessedness; but we do not know how far the measurement of time may be connected with

our bodily organization, and what we do know of the mysterious phenomena of sleep and dreams lends itself to curious and interesting speculations on the subject. But we must not forget the other part, the *conscious* rest and gladness of the happy spirit in His presence (Phil. i. 23).

III. **The Salutation** (Rev. i. 4-6 ; 2 Cor. xiii. 14 ; Eph. ii. 18). We have here the formal beginning of the great Epistle which contains the seven shorter Epistles to the Churches. According to the custom of the time, the writer first puts his own name, then that of those whom he addresses, then words of greeting. This custom, as it existed in the civilized heathen world, is illustrated in Acts xxii. 25, 26. It is interesting to contrast the brief, formal, business-like style of the Roman letter, with the magnificent greetings of the inspired epistles (see Rom. i. 1-7 ; 1 Cor. 1-3)—an instance of the forms and customs of ordinary social life taken up, transfigured, and glorified by Christianity. St John, unlike St Paul, adds here no description of himself as apostle, servant of God, or the like. This may have been partly because verses 1 and 9 rendered it unnecessary, partly because he was so well known to the churches which he addressed, and over which he had been recently presiding. The very fact that this most common and usual of names was thus allowed to stand alone, as a quite sufficient and unmistakeable designation, confirms "the all but unanimous testimony of the Ante-Nicene Church," that the writer was no other than the great apostle, whose position in the church was so unique, and to whom we owe the Gospel and the three Epistles that bear his name. He has been called, since primitive times, by the distinguishing title of St John the Divine, or the Theologian, probably because he taught with such clearness and fulness the doctrine of the *Logos*, or personal Word of God (John i. 1, &c.). The seven churches addressed are afterwards

particularized (ver. 11). No doubt these churches had been the objects of the apostle's peculiar care; but we see throughout the book that the number seven has a symbolical significance. This it had also in the Old Testament. It was the indivisible number, the type of completeness and perfection. So the seven churches symbolize the one perfect Church, the seven spirits mean the one perfect Spirit, whose temple and habitation that Church is. The salutation "grace and peace" was used before by St Paul, and by him alone. It occurs in all the Pauline epistles, except the Pastoral ones. See especially Eph. i. 2, Ephesus being one of the churches addressed here. It is one of the many indications of sympathy of thought and feeling between St John and St Paul. The peculiarly Christian word "grace," replaces the colder "greeting" of Acts xxiii. 26, and even of Acts xv. 23. It signifies the good gifts flowing from the good will and favour of God, and especially those which are spiritual—the work of His Spirit acting on the spirit of man (Gal. v. 22, 23). These are God's *best* things. Grace always precedes peace. Sweet and desirable as is this last (and truly did the old Hebrews say, "No vessel so full of sweetness as that word Shalom," peace), it cannot, in its true sense, exist in the heart, without holiness. The source of grace and peace is the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. In the Pauline epistles the greetings are from the Father and the Son (as Rom. i. 7); here we have the teaching of all Scripture upon the Trinity in unity brought out more clearly and fully.—"*Him which is and which was, and which is to come*"—a paraphrase of the incommunicable name of Jehovah (Ex. iii. 14), expressing self-existence and eternity. "The ever-present *here*, and the everlasting *now*;" "God absolute," and in this place no doubt God the Father. The Spirit is named next,—for another such inversion of the



*normal* Scripture order—Father, Son, and Spirit, see 2 Cor. xiii. 14, showing that “in this Trinity none is greater or less than the other.” As the seven churches symbolize one Church composed of many, so the seven spirits are one Spirit, the source of many gifts and graces (1 Cor. xii. 8-11), the Divine One who can and does dwell at once in ten thousand human hearts, making the body of each believer truly a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. vi. 19), the whole Church being also His temple. Of Jesus Christ the apostle’s heart is full, and he exhausts language to describe what *He* is. What are the three great longings of the human heart in all ages? Beset by doubt and darkness, living in a world of mystery, perplexed by the many voices that sound in our ears, confusing and contradicting each other, we long for *truth*. Surrounded by the empire of death, that awful foe, who crushes our dearest affections, and if we saw nought beyond, would make it scarcely worth our while to elude him for a few short years, we long for *life*. Troubled and grieved at heart by the sight of wrong, cruelty, and oppression all around us, we long for *righteousness*. And Christ is brought before us here as (1) the Truth, (2) the Life, (3) the King of Righteousness. (1) “The witness, the faithful one.” A competent witness, for He has seen all (John iii. 13); a faithful witness, for we may depend to the uttermost on his report of what he has seen. This word witness—*martyr*, is characteristic of St John, who uses it, in noun or verb form, no less than seventy-two times. It was not then, of course, restricted to witnesses who sealed their testimony with their blood, though used for these (ch. ii. 13; Acts xxii. 20). Even in this sense it is applicable to Christ, “Who, before Pontius Pilate, witnessed a good confession.” He Himself first drank of the cup borne to the lips of so many of His followers, “When He, putteth forth His own sheep

He goeth before them" (John x. 4). (2) The words which tell of His victory over death are used also by St Paul (Col. i. 18); they were familiar certainly to one (Col. iv. 16), almost certainly to all the seven churches. In their simple sense, that He was the first to come back to us from the dead, and the pledge that the rest shall follow, they are full of comfort to the sorrowing heart. They give the lie for ever to the mournful "*vestigia nulla retrorsum*" (there are no returning footsteps) of the heathen. He has come back—not only as faithful witness to tell us what is there—but as conqueror, to bring with Him the spoils of victory. But there is more in the word *first-born*. Out of the grave itself comes new birth, life out of death. Christ has made the grave "the gate of life" for the believer; out of the kindly mother earth, who has the precious seed in her keeping, shall spring one day a glorious harvest. (3) The last strand of this threefold cord shows us Christ as the King that shall reign in righteousness, supreme over the kings of the earth, a dignity won by Him (as man), through His death and resurrection. When He comes to reign, He shall make an end for ever of wrong and oppression (Ps. lxxii.). Then follows verse 5, last clause, and 6, an outburst of adoring thankfulness to Him who is all this to us—Prophet, Priest, and King—and all because of the great love wherewith He loved us. The R.V. has it, "Unto Him that *loveth* us," which emphasises a most precious truth. Even of our poor human love (which comes from Him), it is true, as all poets sing, that "Love is indestructible." "Love once begun can never end." How infinitely truer of His which is infinite and eternal, like Himself (Heb. xiii. 8; John xiii. 1; Jer. xxxi. 3). The secret of joy and strength is to realise our own part in this present and everlasting love. Not "He loved St Paul or St John," nor even "He loves His Church," but "He loves me." "*And washed* (or,

according to another ancient reading, *loosed*) *us from our sins*," &c.—pardon and justification through the atoning blood: there is no other way. Note the tense, washed, or "loosed," once for all. It is the privilege of every believer, even the youngest and weakest, to realise that this is a past and finished work, and to rejoice in the forgiveness of sins (1 John ii. 12); "*and made*," &c. The washing is the necessary preparation for the priestly office (Lev. viii. 6); cleansing must come before consecration. We have but one High Priest, Christ Himself, but in a lower and subordinate sense all His people are priests. They are kings, too, or, as the Greek term literally means, *a Kingdom*,—a term which suggests the glorious fellowship which they form, and indicates that thus is fulfilled that Kingdom of heaven or of God, which was the burden of Christ's preaching. As priests they offer sacrifices of prayer and praise (Heb. xiii. 15, 16). As kings they are called on to reign, to hold themselves above the chances and changes of the world, to rule over circumstances, and not let circumstances rule over them. So, the great Priest and King makes us also priests and kings. As one of the early fathers, Irenaeus, beautifully says, "The Son of God, out of His immense love, became what we are, that He might make us what He is." "Unto Him," then, who so loves us, and so proves His love, how can we but render thanks and praise and blessing, and ascribe glory, honour, and dominion for evermore?

IV. The Subject of the Book (Rev. i. 7, 8; Matt. xxiv. 3-14; 1 Thess. v. 1, 2; 1 Thess. iv. 16; Col. i. 15-18). Two grand truths are set before us here, in brief and pregnant language; as if the inspired writer, in a kind of prelude, struck the two key notes of that which was to follow.

(1) Ver. 7.—This verse speaks of the approaching

coming of Christ. We see that it will be *sudden*; the striking interjection. "Behold!" points to this, with the present tense "cometh," and other Scriptures bear out the thought (Matt. xxiv. 27; 1 Thess. v. 2). That it will be *glorious* is shewn by the mention of the clouds of heaven, which also carries back our thoughts to the circumstances of His ascension (Acts i. 9)—a scene which had been witnessed by St John. As He ascended, so shall He descend, "this same Jesus" (Acts i. 11). But whereas His ascension was seen but by a few, and those His own disciples, His coming again shall be *seen by all* (Matt. xxiv. 27-30), including His enemies, and especially those who had been concerned in His death. St John had actually seen Him pierced (St John xix. 34). Zech. xii. 10 is no doubt referred to here, especially as the thought follows that this sight shall be *a cause of mourning* to all the world. Solemn lessons are suggested;—that coming of Christ which the Church desires and prays for, shall *not* bring joy to all, but to many in all lands woe and terror, perhaps despair. All those who have wronged and oppressed the weak and helpless have cause to dread that day (James v. 1-7). But not these alone—all the ungodly shall come under the same condemnation (Amos v. 18). The unready within the professing church are especially warned and threatened (Matt. xxv. 8-13). But there is a sense in which it is true of all without exception, believers and unbelievers, that they mourn, or shall mourn, because of the pierced Saviour, and Zech. xii. 10 throws light on this. We cannot enter now upon its especial aspect towards the house of David, full of hope and comfort as it is, but we may note how this mourning is connected with "the spirit of grace and supplications." Those who see Christ by faith mourn *now* with the mourning of love and penitence, for the wounds wherewith their sins have pierced Him.



The rest shall see Him in the day of judgment, and shall mourn *then* with more bitter and hopeless sorrow. To this announcement are added two brief, emphatic words, which mean the same, "Be it so." But one is Greek, *Nai*, which we translate "even so," the other Hebrew, "amen." For this truth concerns all mankind, Jew and Gentile, and should be known and assented to by all. Nay, more, though so terrible to the ungodly, it is fraught with blessing to the whole toiling, agonising, suffering world (Rom. viii. 19-21). We seem to hear the voice of all creation joining in that "even so, amen."

(2) Verse 8.—The divine grandeur of the person of Christ is as clearly set forth in this book as His second coming. It is a question, indeed, whether it is He who speaks in verse 8. The great name, *the Lord God*, makes it more probable that there the Eternal Father is the speaker. Yet even if we ascribe the words in verse 8 to the Father, the case remains the same (except, perhaps, that they would emphasize the essential oneness of the Son with the Father), since similar terms are used elsewhere unmistakably of the Son (ch. i. 11, 17; ii. 8; xxii. 13, 16; compare Col. i. 16-18). No declaration of essential divinity, couched in human words, could possibly be plainer. If there be any before the first, any after the last, then is Christ not "very God." Jehovah in the Old Testament claims to be the First and Last (Is. xli. 4; xliv. 6), and His name and His glory will He not give to another. But they are given expressly to the Son. The conclusion of the verse seems to refer to the two incommunicable names of God in the Old Testament—the everlasting One, Jehovah, and the Almighty One, El Shaddai (Ex. vi. 3).

But are the three phrases, "first and last," "beginning and ending," "Alpha and Omega," only emphatic threefold repetitions of the same truth?



They are that, certainly, yet not, we think, that only. Christ is "first and last," absolutely as God, but when we follow out the thought we find that "beginning and ending" refers rather to action, or, more broadly, to the doings, circumstances, and conditions of life. Again, Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, have an added significance. Animals have no letters, savages even have none ; they are the symbol and expression—not of humanity merely, but of thinking humanity. They represent *thought*. Christ, then, is the first and last absolutely, the beginning and the ending of all being and doing, the Alpha and Omega of all thinking. As truly as nothing in the universe which was made, was made without Him, so truly is nothing thought there, that He does not know that He is not before, and will not be after. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise." In our age, when thought and speculation are so rife and so prolific, so uncontrolled and so daring, there is much comfort for the believer in keeping fast hold of this truth. Nay, more, what Christ actually is in virtue of His essential Godhead, it is the duty and privilege of each to hold Him, and to make Him to him or herself. Each should ask, is He really with me, and in my life, the "beginning and the ending" of all I am and all I do ? And is He the Alpha and Omega of all that I think ? Is all that I dream and imagine, all that I read and study, submitted to Him, taken from Him, and taken to Him, prepared in His presence, and laid at His feet ? If so, all is safe and all is blessed. If I can say, "Christ is for me the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending," I can say also Rom. viii. 38, 39.

## THE VISION OF CHRIST (Rev. i. 9-16).

I. The Personal Glory of the Ascended Christ, Rev. i. 9-16 ; (Heb. ii. 9 ; 1 Cor. xv. 49). Let us try, as far as we can, to see what John saw, and as he saw it, in that solitary isle of the Ægean Sea, 1800 years ago. It was "the Lord's day," the earliest recorded (and the only Scriptural) instance of the use of this term. For, although some contend that it expresses here the Great Day of the future, the day of the Lord's Second Coming, it most probably, if not certainly, refers to the day which is known to us by that cherished name, "the first day of the week, kept by the Christian Church as the weekly festival of the Lord's resurrection." This "day of rest and gladness" in time took the place of the Jewish Sabbath ; the first day being substituted for the seventh, in accordance, we doubt not, with the will of God, and the spirit of the commandment, which from the beginning enjoined the sanctification of *one day in every seven*. We have here an evidence of how the early followers of Christ used this day, and an example of how we ought to use it. We are told John "was in the Spirit," doubtless meaning in this instance that state of exaltation, and of subjection of their whole being to the influences of the Divine Spirit, in which holy men of old received "visions and revelations of the Lord" (2 Cor. xii. 1-4). The Spirit wrought upon them supernaturally, in a way beyond our comprehension,—sometimes, as it would appear, even transporting their bodies to distant places (Ez. iii. 14, 15 ; Acts viii. 39, 40). But putting aside these extraordinary motions of the Spirit, vouchsafed for special purposes, and on special occasions, all believers may receive His sanctifying grace, and hold communion in Him with the Father and the Son. We should especially seek to be *thus* in the Spirit on the Lord's day :—

“ May I throughout this day of Thine, be in Thy Spirit,  
 Lord :  
 Spirit of humble fear divine, that trembles at Thy  
 Word,  
 Spirit of faith, my heart to raise, and fix on things  
 above,  
 Spirit of sacrifice and praise, of holiness and love.”

It is when we are in the Spirit that Christ reveals Himself to us. He can do this as easily, He often does it more abundantly, when we are like John in Patmos, deprived of outward means of grace, and even of intercourse with fellow Christians. Providences which thus seclude us are His voice calling us, St Mark vi. 31,—and He goes with us there. What John was thinking of that Lord's day we may guess, guided by His Master's words, recorded by himself, John xiv. 26 ; xvi. 13, 14. Christ, we may be very sure, was the theme of his meditation, and Christ was near when he thought of Him. It may be he was longing to see again the face and form which had appeared to him by the sea of Galilee (John xxi. 7). Perhaps, too, he was remembering before Him in prayer the state, circumstances, and wants of those beloved “Churches of Asia,” over which he had been presiding, and which persecution had forced him to leave “as sheep having no shepherd.” The Great Shepherd would reveal to him that He was present with them still (Ez. xxxiv. 11, 12). The voice of Christ was heard by St John before his form was seen (ver. 10). At “the Great Voice as of a trumpet,” the apostle turned, and behold! a glorious vision bursts upon his view. Seven candlesticks of gold, resembling perhaps in form the seven-branched candlestick of the temple, a form familiar to St John. In the midst of the candlesticks, holding in His right hand seven radiant stars, stands a majestic figure, white from head to foot, save where a girdle of gleaming gold encircles the flowing robe ; on His head the snows of eternal years shewing Him to be the Ancient of

Days, seen by an older prophet, "Whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool" (Dan. vii. 9); His feet burning with intense and fiery lustre, "like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace" (R.V.); His countenance like the sun shining in his strength; and issuing from His lips a line of brightness, flashing in that sunlight like a two-edged sword. When we try to *see* this vision two things impress, almost overpower us,—its *majesty* and its *mystery*. There are beauty and glory, transcending human thought; there is also a terrible, awe-inspiring grandeur. But if we seek to realise details, and to combine them so as to form a clear and perfect picture, they seem to baffle us by their very brightness and glory, and to melt into a dazzling indistinctness, "dark with excessive light." But the mystery is as significant as the majesty. We could not *now* look steadfastly upon that Face and Form, still less could we picture it for the imagination. No poet's dream can reach it; the greatest and the boldest wisely stop short at *that*, content to behold in vision—

"No face : only the sight  
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,  
With a hem that I could recognise."\*

For He who appeared to John was *Christ in heaven*, the risen and ascended Christ; Christ as He sits now "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The Face John had seen pale with death on the cross (that death which He "tasted" for him and for us), was the same which he saw in Patmos, shining as the sun in its strength. For thus is He now "crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. ii. 9), even with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John xvii. 5). That is the Divine glory, the glory of God Himself. Yet

\* From "Christmas Eve," by Robert Browning. The interest of this beautiful poem is deepened by the fact that the poet himself has now passed within the veil—where they "see His Face."



amidst the majesty and mystery, one fact is clearly revealed—the glorified form is still human, “One like unto the Son of Man.” Eyes, mouth, hands, feet, are spoken of. That human nature, which for our sakes the Son of Man took upon Himself, He retains for ever. (“*This same Jesus*,” Acts i. 11.) As Man He has entered into the heavens, as Man He sits on the right hand of God.

Unable as we now are, and must be, to behold Him in His glory, it is promised us—and scarce is any promise sweeter to the loving heart—that we shall one day thus behold Him. “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty” (Is. xxxiii. 17); “We shall see Him as He is” (1 John iii. 2); we shall “see His face” (Rev. xxii. 4); we shall behold His glory (John xvii. 24). Love ever longs to behold its object; it longs with ten-fold intensity to behold that object in exaltation, in joy, and in glory. Both these longings shall be fulfilled. Any who can say with truth, “I love Him,” can say also, “I shall see Him in His glory.”

“The altogether Lovely One must be  
Unspeaking in glory—yet ere long  
Thine eyes shall see.”

How is it, then, that we shall one day rejoice to behold that glory and majesty which our weak nature could not now endure, cannot even conceive? Because the other promise, always joined with this one, shall also be fulfilled. We “shall be like Him,” shall have His name (or likeness) in our foreheads, shall not only behold his glory, but shall share it (1 John iii. 2; Rev. xxii. 4; John xvii. 22; 1 Cor. xv. 49; Phil. iii. 21). Therefore this wonderful vision of the risen and ascended Christ may be taken by us,—not only as a picture of what He is now, and how we shall one day see Him,—but also as a sort of pattern or foreshadowing of what all His redeemed shall be one day, when clothed in resurrection glory. ;

II. **The Priestly Office of the Ascended Christ** (Rev. i. 9-16). But we must not suppose that this vision *only* shows us Christ as He is in Heaven, *only* gives us a glimpse of His personal glory. In teaching, symbolical and full of precious meaning, it shows us also what He actually is on earth, where according to His promise (Matt. xxviii. 20) He is present invisibly, yet most really, with and in His Church "unto the end of the world." Be it observed, He whom John saw in vision, "*Walketh* in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (ii. 1). "*Walketh*," moving diligently to and fro, actively engaged, no part escaping His attention; "in the midst," not far away, high above us, but really with, among, close beside us,—with His Church collectively, and with each member of it individually, in all trials, toils, struggles, and difficulties. We are too apt to think of Christ as if He were far away on some distant mountain, whilst we, like the disciples, were "toiling in rowing;" and sometimes when the wind and the sea are tempestuous, we say "it is now dark, and Jesus has not come unto us" (John vi. 15-17). Yet to the eye of faith He is present all the time, and to the heart of faith (even of weak, trembling faith), He will not fail to manifest His presence. It is as the Apostle and High Priest, the Great Head of the Church, that He is thus present with her.

We shall find on examination that each trait in the vision described by St John, not only heightens the general impression of majesty and glory, but gives some definite teaching of what Christ is to us to the end of time. The long flowing garment is the *priestly* robe, the garb of dignity and honour, of rank and office. May it be that this garment, "down to the foot," also speaks of rest? He who labours girds his garment up, lest it should impede him; he who rests from his labours wears the flowing robe appropriate to repose and festivity. We are thus reminded that the atoning work of Christ

is finished for evermore ; that when, as our representative and substitute, He had by Himself purged our sins, *He sat down for ever, &c.* What the golden girdle represents we learn from Is. xi. 5, compared with Eph. vi. 14. Righteousness, faithfulness, truth, these encompass our Great High Priest like a band of gold, most pure, most precious ; encircling His breast, perhaps to show that they are in His *heart* for us, more expressive than even the girdle of the loins, the type of action and energy.

*His head and His hair, &c.*, compare Dan. vii. 9. The Son of Man is thus identified with the Ancient of Days, Himself "very God," whose goings forth are from everlasting (Micah v. 2), with whom there is neither beginning of days, nor end of time. Yet we may find a farther meaning here, this description being emphatically that of Christ's glorified *human* nature. "The hoary head is a crown of glory," one of the most beautiful things the eye can look upon, "more beautiful even to the mental eye where it is the symbol of wisdom gained, character tried and found faithful, experience won in many a hard-fought fight." \* But, associated with the hoary hair, are those eyes of fire which tell of everlasting youth and vigour. This Man unites with the wisdom of all the ages, the fire and energy of eternal youth. He has within Himself the fountain of life, ever fresh, ever new. Remember, too, that the eyes of flame are penetrating,—far seeing. He looks us through and through (Heb. iv. 13). All things are naked and open before Him. Are we glad that it is thus, or does the thought terrify us? We should

\* "It belongs to those who have seen the sorrows and sufferings and trials of this life through to the end, and have reached the goal; who have been brought through the perils of the journey and survived them; to those whose joys and hopes and cares are centred upon others rather than themselves; whose aims for this life are attained as far as they will ever be; who think more of the day that is dawning upon others dear to them than of the day that is closing upon themselves."—*From a MS. Sermon by the Rev. C. H. Waller.*



shrink from the idea of the dearest, tenderest friend we have thus reading every thought and intent of our hearts. But if His knowledge is infinite, infinite also is His love. This infinite knowledge of love is indeed our safeguard. For since we cannot adequately know ourselves, nor guess what evil things, fraught with destruction, may slumber in those depths within which the plummet line of consciousness has never sounded, it is our peace and safety that we may turn to Him, leave all with Him and pray, Ps. cxxxix. 23. But for this, both the sense of solitude and the sense of responsibility would be appalling. Still, even the holiest—though they would not have them turned away—must shrink instinctively at first from meeting those eyes of flame; and so we see the look the apostle had raised to the Face drop in an instant to the Feet—those “blessed feet,” which were “nailed for our advantage to the bitter cross.” John, who once saw them pierced and blood-stained, sees them glorified now, “like unto burnished brass,”—literally, *chalcolibanus*—a word of which the precise meaning is now lost, but which probably signified some fine and precious compound metal, well known to the luxurious, highly civilized people whom John was addressing. “Burning in the furnace,” or just fresh from the fire, with “that exquisitely pure glow that we see upon refined metal, one of the most beautiful things in the world of its kind.” And beautiful indeed are the Feet of Him who is the great bringer of good tidings and publisher of peace (Is. lii. 7). Moreover, the feet of Christ may be taken to mean His ways, His dealings, especially with His Church. Then we have these three characteristics—strength, as of brass or other tempered metal (Deut. xxxiii. 25), truth and faithfulness, as tried in the furnace (Rev. xv. 3; Ps. xviii. 30), and glory and beauty, as of the burnished metal, which indeed they possess in the eyes



of all who love Him and them. "*His voice as the sound of many waters,*" in might and majesty. Well may this be, when it shall one day awaken the dead who sleep in the dust of earth (John v. 28, 29), and does actually even now awaken the dead in spirit (John v. 20).

"*In His right hand,*" &c. Here the stars are interpreted by many as the ministers and rulers or presiding presbyters of His Church (ver. 20), and it is in a peculiar manner true of faithful ministers, who turn many to righteousness, that they are like stars (Dan. xii. 3), and that they are in the hand of Christ to keep them safe. But it is also true of all His people (Deut. xxxiii. 3 ; Eccles. ix. 1). Can there be a better, happier, safer place than this ? For a thing to be held in the hand implies possession, absolute disposal, extreme care. A man can hold nothing so securely as that which he holds in his hand (see John x. 28, 29). *The two-edged sword, i.e.,* two-mouthed, sharpened on the back and on the front, issuing from the mouth, may mean the Word of Christ (Heb. iv. 12 ; see also Eph. vi. 17). Possibly, as distinguished from His voice, it means here the written Word, which, interpreted and applied by the Spirit, has been since His ascension the great means of government and guidance to His Church. *His countenance,* &c. Like the sun, not only for its brightness, majesty, and glory, but because it is the source of light, life, and blessing to His people ; He is the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. iv. 2), and takes in the spiritual the place of the sun in the natural world. In His "wings," or "beams," there is healing, hope, joy. So we pray Ps. iv. 6. Even here and now He is the light of His Church ; and hereafter will the glorious promise of Is. lx. 19, 20, be entirely and perfectly fulfilled to her (Rev. xxi. 23).

III. **The effect of the Vision,** Rev. i. 17 (Isa. vi. 5 ; Job xlii. 5, 6 ; Luke v. 8 ; John vi. 20 ; Isa. xliii.

25). “*And when I saw, etc.*” Can we wonder at this? So it was with Ezekiel (i. 28); with Daniel (viii. 17; x. 8). The glory of the vision would in itself overpower the gazer. We feel, moreover, an instinctive awe and terror at any visitation from the mysterious unseen world. We sometimes long for gifts and privileges, which if vouchsafed to us, we should be quite unable to use, or even to bear. And we have to reckon not only with humanity, but with sinful humanity. From the brief hint given us in the opening book of the Bible, where we hear of “the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” we may gather perhaps that if man were unfallen, spiritual visitation and intercourse might be enjoyed and welcomed. Both revelation and experience certainly teach that the consciousness of sin intensifies a thousand fold our terror of the unseen. Sinful man dreads instinctively *any* visitation from God. He is apt to think, like the widow that ministered to Elijah, that if God should remember him at all, it could only be to call him to account for his sins, 1 Kings xvii. 18. But when the Divine glory is actually beheld (not in its full effulgence, for the face of God no man can see and live, Ex. xxxiii. 20; John i. 18; 1 Tim. vi. 16, but in such visions and glimpses as were vouchsafed to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, to Daniel, to John), then indeed does the Divine holiness and purity strike the sinful heart with awe and terror (Isa. vi. 5; Job xlii. 5, 6). In that “white light” His saints of old beheld their own blackness as they had never done before. It was the *holiness* of God (God’s greatest glory is His Holiness) which made them know they were vile, and cry—“Woe is me!”—“I repent in dust and ashes.” So also in the case of Peter, when the Lord manifested His Divine power (Luke v. 8). We may note in passing that in Isaiah’s cry of penitent anguish (vi. 5) the sin of his *lips*, and of the lips of his people, seemed to be especially that

which came into remembrance (compare James iii. 2, and see Matt. xii. 36, 37). How would every vain and sinful word that we have spoken appear to *us*, if we stood in the unveiled presence of the Divine Holiness?

But Christ had not come to His servant to overpower and to terrify him with the glory of His presence, or the revelation of His Holiness. He had come to *bless* him; and to bless His Church through him to the end of time, with the Revelation of which he was to be made the channel. So we read, "He laid His right hand upon me, saying, fear not." We have here (1) the touch of Christ, (2) the words of Christ. Well did John know the touch of that hand. Had it not often met his before in the trustfulness, the helpfulness, of human friendship? Had he not seen it laid upon the sick to heal them, upon the blind to restore their sight, and even upon the bier where the dead was lying, whom He called back to life? He had seen it also on the cross pierced for his sins and ours; on the mount of Ascension raised to bless him and the other disciples as He parted from them. No doubt that touch, like the name spoken to Mary (John xx. 16), carried home to his heart the assurance that the glorious being he had not dared to look upon was the "same Jesus" with whom he had walked on earth, who loved him and whom he loved. But it was not only a *re-assuring*, it was also a strengthening touch, like that vouchsafed to Daniel (x. 18). It enabled him to stand and look, to listen, and to write that which follows. (2) The word came with it, "Fear not." Divine communications in all ages have thus been ushered in and accompanied (compare Gen. xv. 1; xxi. 17; Dan. x. 12, 19; Luke i. 13, 30; ii. 10; Matt. xxviii. 5). God's "Fear not" assures the removal of the guilt of sin, which makes man afraid in His presence (Isa. vi. 7; xliii. 25). He before



whose holiness our nature trembles is the same whose love puts away and pardons our transgressions. Our God, the Thrice holy One, is Himself our Saviour and our Redeemer. Here accordingly the glorified Christ reminds His trembling disciple that He "was dead"—had died for him. Have *we* felt the touch of His hand, and heard His voice speaking to us? If so, we shall one day behold His glory without fear, nay, with "exceeding joy."

IV. **The Resurrection and the Life**, Rev. i. 18 (R.V.) John xi. 25, 26). The general scope and intention of these words was no doubt the re-assurance, comfort, and strengthening of the trembling Apostle. But all the words of Christ reach far beyond their immediate scope and purpose, and reveal eternal, life-giving truths, full of teaching for all times and for all circumstances. This word of Christ's reminds us at once of another marvellous saying, John xi. 25, 26. Each illustrates the other. As given in the R.V. (correctly, we are told, after the Greek), it falls naturally into two parts. (1) "I am the first and the last and the Living one." (2) "And I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." In (1) we have an assertion, one of the many which abound in this book, of Christ's essential God-head (see on ver. 8). But there is a wonderful addition, introductory to what follows about the victory over death. "The Living One"—which means not only that He lives, nor even only that he gives life to others, but that He Himself *is the Life*. Life essential, Life underived and independent, the source of all life, created or imparted. "The fountain of life" (Ps. xxxvi. 9). "In Him was life" (John i. 4). To this truth, in John xi., our Lord leads up His scholar, Martha. First He tells her that her brother, a believer in Him, shall rise again, and then reveals the farther truth, not only

that He can and will raise him from the dead, but that He actually *is* the Resurrection, has in Himself the Resurrection power. Lastly, He is the Resurrection because *He is the Life*. "I am the Resurrection," and *more than that*, "I am the Life." This is the climax of the whole, the great truth out of which the others spring.

(2.) *And I was*—lit: *became*—*dead*. Here we see the Living One become subject to death; which He could only do by taking upon Him a mortal nature (Heb. ii. 9, 14; Phil. ii. 7, 8). He actually died, and died "the death of the cross" (the most bitter and humiliating form that death could take). "And behold!" Look! He whom thou seest now has passed through death, and come forth unhurt and victorious. He has entered into life everlasting, "unto the ages of the ages." He who *as God* is the Living One, *as man*, having died, now lives, and lives for evermore (Rom. vi. 9). Believers are one with Christ, and partake thus in His death and Resurrection (Rom. vi. 8). It would be apart from our present purpose to consider the bearing of this wonderful truth upon our Justification; on which see Rom. iv. 25. We have only now to think of it in relation to our Resurrection, and everlasting life with Him. Like Christ, the believer, being dead, shall live again; like Christ, the believer, being alive, shall never die. Both these assertions are plainly made in St John xi. 25, 26. The dead in Christ, we know, shall live again in that Resurrection unto life of which Christ is the first fruits (1 Cor. xv. 20-23). The other statement is at first sight less easy to understand. To do so we must compare John viii. 51, 53. That which we call death is not death to the believer; it is only its shadow, its similitude. It is not the loss of life in any real sense, for he lives; it is not separation from God, for he goes to be with God for ever. The sting, the bitterness of death is taken away, he does not "taste" it or "see"

it, he only falls asleep in Jesus. Christ tasted death (Heb. ii. 9), but that was for us, that we might never taste it. This truth lies folded up in the passage immediately before us. For here we see Christ coming forth from the grave and gate of death not only as freed from its dominion, but as *conqueror* and *ruler* over it. Through death He conquered death (Heb. ii. 14, 15 ; Col. ii. 15). The keys are delivered up to a conqueror in token of submission ; they are borne by a ruler in token of right and power to do what he will. That reference is made here to Isa. xxii. 22 is shown conclusively by chap. iii. 7. Death is the gate, Hades the realm to which that gate is the entrance—the mysterious, invisible world into which the departed pass. Innumerable are the dwellers there, millions upon millions, so that we say expressively, when any one dies, that he is “gone over to the majority.” We know little of that world ; but we do know that it is divided within itself, and that not only no passing out, but no passing to and fro between its parts is permitted (Luke xvi. 26). But *all* the keys are in the hand of Christ.—He is “Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Rom. xiv. 9). This should quiet anxious thoughts, and silence perplexing questionings ; it is the Hand that bled for man which holds the destinies of man. This passage, then, brings a picture before the mental eye. We seem to see that great and terrible gateway which looms ever before us in the pathway of life, from the cradle to the grave. One of its portals stands always open, whilst there passes through a never-pausing, never-ending stream—young and old, great and small, our own nearest and dearest too amongst them—they pass and are seen no more. But the other portal, that which should *open outwards*, has been close shut throughout the ages ; never a movement, never a gleam of light from within. In vain have breaking hearts beset it, frenzied hands knocked against it, neither cries,



nor prayers, nor knockings have availed to gain an answer. But "Behold !" in the fulness of time the gate swings back upon its hinges ; and One who had been seen to go in comes forth again triumphant, the "keys," the token of victory, in His hand. "I am alive for evermore," saith He, "and whosoever believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Now He has passed from our sight once more, "gone away into the Heavens," and we cannot see His glorified form, save with the eye of faith. But the dark gateway has lost its terrors for us, since we know that the keys are His ; that it is His hand which unlocks its portal for us and our dear ones to enter, that He stands within to receive and welcome us there, and that one day he will unbar the other side, and "they that are in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth."

### THE COMMISSION (Rev. i. 9-11, 19, 20).

I. **By whom given?** Rev. i. 11 (ver. 8 ; Heb. xii. 25). We must recall here what we have already learned of the personal glory and the priestly dignity of the ascended Christ, and remember that the words that follow are the words of Him who *is* all this, and all this to and for His Church. In the seven brief letters we are about to consider, we hear Christ speaking from heaven to His Church on earth ; we have Divine authority and omniscience, combined with human tenderness and sympathy. We see our great High Priest in the exercise of that portion of His office which deals with man, showing Himself "merciful and faithful" (Heb. ii. 17), able to succour them that are tempted (ii. 18), touched with the feeling of our infirmities (iv. 15). Here, too, He speaks from heaven for the last time. After this silence falls. No great voice, as of a trumpet, is ever heard again speaking words of awe and mystery ; and the book in which this wonderful vision is recorded (though in all probability it

was not the last to be committed to writing), fitly closes the canon of Scripture. Still, it would not be true to say that after this Christ has never spoken at all to His Church, because He is present with her according to His promise (Matt. xxviii. 20) to the end of time, and throughout the ages He speaks to her by His Spirit, who teaches, testifies of Him, guides into all truth (John xiv. 26 ; xvi. 13). But there is a wide difference between Christ speaking from heaven to men, and Christ speaking in men by His Spirit. No *new* revelation of the mind and will of God has been given us since the closing of the canon. (The words of Rev. xxii. 18, though they may refer only to the book of which they form a part, and warn us especially against any interference with the text of that book, are significant in this connection). Consequently no man may set forth with authority any doctrine to be believed in the Church which is not contained either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures. Anything contrary to Scripture *must* be false ; anything unsupported by Scripture *may* be false. Therefore there is no "development of doctrine" possible, in the sense of adding to that which has been already revealed. Nevertheless, there is a right kind of development of doctrine, which consists in the Church, under the guidance of the Spirit, finding out ever more and more of the meaning of that revelation which God gave her in the beginning. "Old truths seem new to us when looked at in new lights, and each jewel of truth given by Christ to His Church (like the precious stone, Prov. xvii. 8) shines with new lustre when examined and turned in every direction by careful and reverent hands." These last words of Christ, which are let down to us from heaven like a chain of pearls, will repay our care and diligence, and will shine more brightly the more attentively and minutely they are regarded.



II. To whom given ? i. 9, 10 (John xiii. 23 ; xxi. 24 ; 1 John v. 13 ; Mark x. 39). No man, of all the sons of men, could look back upon a more momentous or more interesting past than the aged servant of God to whom this commission was given. No man had been more highly honoured. John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, and the brother of James, was called early to be an apostle of Christ. He was one of the Three within the Twelve who were our Lord's most intimate and chosen associates. (See Mark v. 37 ; Matt. xvii. 1 ; xxvi. 37). He was, indeed, the nearest of the three to his Lord, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (St John xiii. 23 ; xix. 26 ; xx. 2 ; xxi. 7, 20, 24). He was the apostle who stood by the cross of Jesus along with his mother and the other holy women (John xix. 25). He was also the first who stood beside the sepulchre, outrunning even the eager Peter. Of him, together with his brother, our Lord uttered the remarkable prophecy, Mark x. 39. Yet the subsequent history of the two was altogether unlike. James was the first to follow his Master to heaven ; John long survived all the other apostles. James was cut off too early to admit of his taking any considerable part in the guidance of the Church, and no writing of his remains to us ; John laboured for his Lord to extreme old age, and contributed to the canon five inspired writings. Still to both alike the Master said, "Ye shall drink of my cup, be baptized with my baptism." Have we not here an indication that the "cup" and the "baptism" of Christ are not the martyr's portion and privilege alone, but partaken of by all His faithful followers, however different may be their trials and the circumstances of their lives ? It is not the fact of martyrdom, but the martyr's faith and love ;—not the amount of work accomplished in long years of service, but the servant's devoted heart and ministering will ;—that Christ owns and recompenses.

Some suppose that the touching charge given to St John by His dying Lord (John xix. 26, 27), in itself a proof of the special bond between them, accounts for the little we hear of him during the first years after the ascension. In the book of Acts he is not mentioned, save in conjunction with Peter. We know that he continued at Jerusalem with the other apostles, and that he was greatly looked up to, regarded as a "pillar" by the infant Church (Gal. ii. 9, R.V.). Yet it was James, the Lord's brother, who took the oversight of the church in the capital (see Acts xv.), and who is called in Church history the first bishop of Jerusalem. John would appear to have left Jerusalem before Paul's last visit to the city (Acts xxi. 18, A.D. 60). We find him next at Ephesus, but not until after an interval of several years. He was not the founder of the Church there (see Acts xix.), nor did he appoint its first chief pastor, Timothy (see 1 Tim. i. 3). There is no reference to him in the epistles of St Paul to the Asiatic Churches and to Timothy; from which we may infer with certainty that he did not take up his residence there until after the martyrdom of the great apostle of the Gentiles, A.D. 64. There, however, he spent (with one remarkable interval) the remainder of a life prolonged beyond the ordinary lot of humanity. Thence, according to tradition, he was exiled to Patmos under Domitian, but allowed to return under his successor, the milder Nerva; when he resumed the oversight of the Churches, opposed the Gnostic heresies, and wrote, as is generally supposed, the Gospel and the three Epistles that bear his name. Of his old age in Ephesus some well-known anecdotes remain to us. We have the story of the Christian youth who apostatized and became chief of a robber band, but was brought back to penitence and faith by the heroic and self-sacrificing love of the aged apostle; the incident of his meeting

a notorious heretic named Cerinthus accidentally in a public bath, and rushing out hastily in alarm, "lest," said he, "the bath should fall upon us;" lastly, the beautiful tradition which represents him, in extreme old age, and much weakness of mind and body, borne by loving disciples into the assemblies of the faithful, only to murmur with failing voice the oft-repeated exhortation, "Little children, love one another." "Father, why do you always tell us the same things?" his hearers would sometimes ask. "Because it is the Lord's commandment, and if this only be done, it is enough." So spake the beloved and loving apostle who recorded for us St John xiii. 34, and penned 1 John ii. 7, 8. Not, it is said, until he had attained his hundredth year, did his Lord call him to rest with Him for ever. St John xxi. 22 had given rise to an expectation in the Church, which, however, he himself does not seem to have shared (see ver. 23), that he would survive until the Second Advent. He did live to witness the coming of Christ in judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem. The resting place of his mortal remains is not known; but his memory is preserved in the name of the only inhabited spot near the heap of ruins which was once great Ephesus, a wretched Turkish village called Ayasalouk, which may be, as some suppose, a corruption of the Greek *Agios Theologos*, the holy theologian, St John the divine.

St John's banishment to Patmos took place in the course of a persecution in which many Christians were martyred, and others exiled to desolate islands. Some suppose this to have been the persecution which occurred under the emperor Nero, or one in the time of the emperor Galba. Others take it to have been the later persecution, about 95 A.D., under the emperor Domitian. We know no other instance of the selection of Patmos as a place of



exile, but that barren rocky islet in the Egæan sea was well suited for the purpose, and its comparative nearness to Ephesus might have caused it to be chosen. But if the exile of St John was intended by his enemies as a punishment, they more than missed their aim : for what were the groves and gardens of Ephesus to him who saw the Face of the glorified Christ, the crystal sea, the white robed elders, and the jasper throne? If, as is probable, they desired to deprive the Churches he watched over of his care and guidance, here also they more than failed, for the letters sent from Patmos came weighted with the power, and winged with the name, of One greater than the greatest of apostles, and must have been a richer gift to the Churches than even the personal presence of John. We may then picture the aged apostle, probably more than sixty years after the last time he had seen His Lord in the flesh, receiving this commission from His hands in his solitary place of exile. His description of himself (ver. 9) is remarkable for its modesty and simplicity. He who might have called himself apostle and father in Christ, calls himself instead brother and companion (see Matt. xxiii. 8-10). The pride and ambition of early years (Mark x. 37), had passed from him ; for he had learned in his Master's school, and grown like Him. He reminds both himself and his flock that the "kingdom and patience," or patient suffering, of Jesus Christ must go together—he who would inherit the one must first possess the other (2 Tim. ii. 12). "Kingdom and patience which are in Jesus," R.V. Not "the patient waiting for Christ," nor yet a patience like that of Christ Himself, but "an endurance which had its life and energy in union with Him."

III. **For whom given?** i. 11 (Acts xix. 10 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 19 ; John xvii. 20 ; Rev. ii. 29). Note the definiteness of this command. Christ calls both churches and individuals by name (John x. 3).



This shows at once His intimate knowledge and His loving care (Isaiah xlix. 16). As our High Priest, Christ has the names of the tribes (or Churches) engraved on His shoulder for government, on His heart for love (Ex. xxxix. 6, 7, and 14-16). *Our* names, and those of the cities where we dwell, are as intimately known and as dear to Him as Ephesus, Smyrna, &c. We may use them plainly in our prayers, and plead for them and for their interests with distinctness and definiteness. The Asia mentioned here is of course not the continent, nor even the country now called Asia Minor, but the *province* of the Roman Empire then called Asia (Acts ii. 9 ; vi. 9 ; xvi. 10 ; x. 16, 18 ; 2 Tim. i. 15). Of this province Ephesus was the capital ; it was the great sea-port, and in every sense the chief city. Its Church was also the most interesting and remarkable of the whole group ; it might be called the Metropolitan Church, being the residence of St John himself, and the centre from which he ruled and guided the other churches. That it should be named first was natural and inevitable. But the other churches mentioned may suggest some questions. We may ask (1) why were *seven* churches selected ? (2) Why *these* seven ? and (3) Why these seven *in this order* ? (1) There were certainly more than seven churches at this time in the province of Asia, probably many more ;—for instance, the Church of Colosse, to which St Paul addressed an epistle. But the number seven symbolises completeness and perfection (see on ver. 4), and so the seven churches stand for and symbolise the complete and perfect Church—one in diversity. The seven addresses to them form, when combined, what may be called a pastoral letter from the Lord in heaven to His Church militant here on earth, in which each community and each individual has its own special word of encouragement or warning. (2) These particular seven churches

(rather than others) were chosen perhaps not merely for their importance, but also for their representative character, as affording a complete example of the different types and shades to be found amongst professing Christians—not only at that time but throughout all ages,—and bringing out into strong relief the trials, temptations, and dangers that beset the Church of Christ. How frequently, for instance, does the loss of first love come home to experience ; and what a beacon light for the struggling and suffering church in all ages, has been the exhortation to Smyrna, “Be thou faithful unto death.” (3) But why these seven in this order? It is scarcely that of their relative importance ; it may perhaps have been suggested by their geographical position, forming a kind of circuit, such as the bearer of the letters might have taken, starting from Ephesus, and ending with Laodicea. But some interpreters find a mystic significance in the order of these churches. They regard the letters as affording a consecutive view of the state of the Church until the second coming of Christ—in fact, as a brief compendium of Church history. This idea, which is not peculiar to any school of prophetic interpretation, certainly offers some attractive features to the thoughtful student, alike of Scripture and of Church history. The task of applying the seven epistles to seven consecutive epochs of Church history has its difficulties, but they do not meet us at the outset. On the contrary, the condition of Ephesus seems a very striking picture of the post-apostolic age, the age that St John himself had lived to see, when soundness of doctrine was still maintained, but the warmth and fervour of “first love” were waning. Again, Smyrna shows the Church under the sifting and purifying influence of persecution, the martyr Church of the primitive age, tried and suffering, but faithful. It is after these two that the landmarks grew difficult

to discern; interpreters differing widely in the epochs they assign to Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia. Nearly all agree, however, in supposing that comfortable, self-satisfied, lukewarm Laodicea affords a forecast of the "last days," the state in which the professing Church will be found immediately before the coming of the Lord (see Luke xviii. 8; Matt. xxiv. 12; xxv. 5). But as it was certainly true that amongst the churches of the apostle's day all the seven characters were to be found, so it has been in the intermediate ages, and so it will be to the end of time. It may be a matter of speculative interest to assign a special place in this panoramic view of "the time-condition of the churches," to the church under Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, and to the church in the middle ages, but it is of far nearer and more intimate concern to us to find our own place in it, and to appropriate the counsels, warnings, and promises intended for ourselves.

IV. **The Stars and the Candlesticks**, Rev. i. 20 (Deut. xxxiii. 3; Dan. xii. 3; Zech. iv. 2; Luke viii. 16). "The stars are the angels of the seven churches." But who are these angels? As it is best to take the Divine Word literally, unless we find good cause for understanding it otherwise, we think first of the "ministering spirits" so often mentioned in Scripture, and mentioned too as concerning themselves with the interests of the Church. The language of Dan. x. 20, 21, and xii. 1, lends colour to the supposition that nations or communities may have their representative or protecting angels, specially deputed to watch over their interests. But upon this mysterious subject little is revealed to us, and we must be careful not to go beyond that little. And on turning to the passage before us, we find that the literal interpretation would involve us in many difficulties, perhaps even absurdities. How, for instance, could the language



of Rev. ii. 10, or iii. 15 be addressed with propriety to a literal angel? We must remember that these seven were *real* letters, written with actual pen and ink upon parchment, and despatched probably by the ordinary means of transmission to real places, where some person entitled to do so must have received and read them in the churches. They were addressed to *men*, not to angels, and as each epistle is addressed to *one* as representing a community, that one must have been a man. Some suppose that we have traces in the New Testament of such an adapted use of the term angel. The word means "messenger," and messengers of the churches may have been so called. From messenger to minister the transition is easy, and favoured by Heb. i. 14. But in large churches like Ephesus there were many ministers, whether called elders (presbyters) as in Acts xx. 17, or bishops (overseers) and deacons, as in Phil. i. 1. Here only *one* in each church is addressed; and that one is addressed as representative of all, and responsible for all,—blamed for what is wrong, praised for what is right, and charged to execute the Divine commands. So we are led up to the thought that he must have been the presiding minister or "overseer" of the church. We know from Scripture that the apostles usually appointed some one to preside over each church, *e.g.*, St Paul set Timothy over Ephesus, Titus over Crete, and tradition supplies the names of others similarly appointed. At what time the term "bishop," or overseer, came to be applied *exclusively* to such presiding ministers we do not know. It was not so applied when St Paul wrote to the Philippians; but at least it had acquired this application, which it has ever since retained, early in the post-apostolic age. Here, therefore, the chief ministers (and we doubt not also *all* faithful ministers and pastors) of the Church of Christ are set before us as



“stars” (Dan. xii. 3), and as in the hand of Christ. They have onerous duties and terrible responsibilities (see 1 Tim. i. 18 ; iv. 12-16 ; 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2—words actually addressed to the presiding minister of Ephesus, although *not* to the angel of Rev. ii. 1-7). Compare Ezekiel xxxiv. 2, and xxxiii. 1-9. The character of the flock depends in great measure on that of the pastor ; they reflect him ; his spiritual interests and their’s are bound up together. They should sympathise with him, share his joys and griefs, deal tenderly with his failures and mistakes. They should not on the one hand criticise or disparage, on the other idolise, or elevate him into a party leader, but esteem him very highly in love for his work’s sake,—above all, pray for him (Col. iv. 3 ; Eph. vi. 19 ; 2 Thess. iii. 1). Among stars all are not alike—“one star differeth from another star in glory ;” he that makes his pound ten pounds shall have rule over ten cities ; as there are degrees in diligence and faithfulness here, so there shall be degrees hereafter in glory and reward.

A candlestick, or lamp-stand, is a striking emblem of a visible church. It is a light holder : its object being to keep safe and render visible the light that is in it. There may be light without a candlestick—spiritual light in the hearts of individuals where there is no church at all, or a corrupt one. But such light is unprotected, in danger of extinction, and unable to fulfil its object of enlightening those around. Or, there may be a candlestick without light—a visible church in which the light has gone out through apostasy or unfaithfulness. Ephesus was in danger of falling into this state (Rev. ii. 5), and then the candlestick, being useless, would be removed. These were golden candlesticks, the material beautiful and precious ; emblem of the Church, which, when perfected, shall be “glorious,” shining as gold refined in the furnace ; even now it

is precious, unspeakably, in the eyes of Christ. They were seven—the perfect number ; showing that in the Church dwells the perfect, sevenfold Spirit (ver. 4). If, as most believe, what John saw in vision was the similitude of the seven-branched candlestick of the temple—seven branches rising from a single stem, the emblem becomes still clearer—many churches, yet one Church of Christ ; many visible, one invisible and perfect, the Bride and the Body of Christ, of which each believer is a member (Eph. v. 25-27).

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SEVEN LETTERS (Parts of Rev. ii., iii).

I. “These things saith He,” Rev. ii. 1, &c. (Heb. iv. 12 ; Jer. xxiii. 29). There are some words of Christ which are addressed alike to all His people, and which suit equally the needs of all. Others suit special circumstances and cases. We therefore find in these letters some features common to the group, others differing in each. Each begins with identifying the Writer. “These things saith He,” followed by some trait or feature taken from the magnificent description of ch. i. 13-17. It was the custom then to begin letters with the writer’s name (see on ch. i. 1). Here the *character* is substituted for the *name* ; as throughout Scripture *name* and *character* are used interchangeably. The diversity of each beginning is significant. Ch. i. 12-19 shows Christ as He is at all times and to all His Church ; the great High Priest, complete, perfect, answering every need and fulfilling every requirement. But what He is to each varies according to the need and the faith of each, varies even to the same individual at different times. Some know Him chiefly in one of His characters, some in two or three, few perhaps in all—*e.g.*, some know Him almost entirely as the Saviour, others also as the

Friend and Brother. Often in times of special trial and temptation, He shines upon us suddenly in some light unseen before, meeting the new need with a new grace—Consoler, Brother, Counsellor, Guide, as the case may be. We shall find here that the way in which He reveals Himself to each Church has a special bearing either upon the character or the circumstances of the Church, either on its outward or its inward needs. To Ephesus, the leading and representative Church, He assumes a character showing His general superintendence of the whole ; and yet with a special application. The High Priest walks amidst the Candlesticks to take care of them, and to trim their lights (Lev. xxiv. 2-4). And *this* light, as we shall see, particularly needed trimming ; it had lost its early brightness, and was growing dim, so as to be even in danger of removal. To Smyrna, the martyr church, with the stake and the scaffold in full view, speaks the Conqueror of death,—He who “was dead and is alive.” Moreover, the prevailing worship of heathen Smyrna is said to have been that of Bacchus, the god of whom it was fabled that he went down to the grave and came back again. To this fable, which as it had no historical foundation had also no moral significance, Christ opposes the glorious *Truth*, so momentous and far-reaching in its consequences, that He has in very deed come back triumphant from the realm of Hades. For Pergamos He bears the sharp two-edged sword, Himself indicating its application (ii. 16). Yet, considering that church’s record of high praise mingled with serious blame, we remember that the two-edged sword not only strikes but *divides* (Heb. iv. 12)—is keen and unerring in its separation of right from wrong, truth from error, the faithful from the false. To Thyatira, another church with a mingled record, His eyes are a flame of fire to discern, while His feet “that walked in labour, are beautiful in glory.” There may also be a reference



to the popular representations of the Sun God Apollo, the tutelar deity of heathen Thyatira ; Christ would show Himself to His Church as the true Sun, the Sun of Righteousness. Sardis, which had a name to live but was dead, is reminded that Christ hath the seven-fold Spirit, the source of life, to give to all who ask Him. To faithful Philadelphia He is the Faithful One, the Holy and the True ; and He has the key of David to set before His servants an open door, which no man can shut. To Laodicea He dwells yet more emphatically upon His character of truth, as well as upon the dignity of His person ; He is the "Amen," the truth, (in Is. lxxv. 16, God of truth is literally "God of amen"), the faithful and true witness, who knows what He says, and says what He knows. For His witness of this church is strange and sad indeed ; His estimate of her condition being in striking contrast to her own, so that presumably nothing short of His divine dignity and essential truth could prevail upon her to accept it. But always, and in whatsoever character He speaks, He is Christ speaking from heaven. It is the Divine Word, sharper than any two-edged sword, mightier than the living flame, heavier than the hammer which breaks the rock in pieces.

II. "I know thy works," ch. ii. 2, &c. (Prov. xv. 3 ; Eccles. ix. 1 ; Heb. vi. 10). Our Lord, after describing Himself the speaker, begins His special address to each church with the word "I know," and in five cases at least out of the seven with the words, "I know thy works." After the revelation of what Christ is, the next step is the assurance of His knowledge of what we are,—the bringing that which He is to bear, in all its fulness and brightness, upon our hearts and consciences. His knowledge of us is *perfect* ; not like our knowledge of each other, so partial and incomplete, and therefore often so misleading, that the kindest and wisest continually misunderstand and misjudge. The "eyes of



flame" look us through and through ; knowing us—not *as* we know ourselves, for no kind of deception is more common and more easy than self-deception—but as we are in reality and truth. But Christ's knowledge of us is *loving*, else would its perfectness be a thought too terrible for our mortal weakness. Because He knows all He can sympathise with all ; on the one hand He can fully gauge the temptation and the trial ; on the other He can discern and expose the subtlest evil lurking in the intricate folds of the heart. The "works" said here to be the object of His knowledge are not, necessarily, good works. In ch. ii. 19, "works" occurs twice in both our versions, but the word is not the same in the Greek. The "works" Christ knows, here as elsewhere, are *doings* (all the activities, good, bad, and indifferent, of the persons addressed), the works He praises are *labours* of faith and love. The lesson therefore for us is Christ's perfect knowledge of all our doings great and small ; of what we call, though wrongly, "the trivial work of every day," as well as of the more momentous steps and crises of our lives. We may, and ought to, bring *all* to Him for guidance and direction. We sometimes say to a friend, "I can go to you for advice, because you know all the circumstances." We can only have this confidence always and entirely in one Friend, in Him by whom "actions are *weighed*" (1 Sam. ii. 3). Let us consider the exceedingly complex characters of our "works" or doings. Each action is like a plant ; it springs from a seed of thought (or perhaps more than one), so small as to be scarcely perceptible, perhaps long hidden in the depths of the heart, nourished by the mental soil around it, and finally fed and ripened by the air and the sun of circumstance and environment. He who weighs the actions must weigh all these subtle influences, must unravel all intricacies of motive and purpose, else would His knowledge be imperfect, and His

award liable to error. But He "understandeth our thought afar off" (Ps. cxxxix. 1-16). Realising all this, we may pray with confidence, vv. 23, 24. In the two possible exceptions, Smyrna and Pergamos, where some read, "I know thy tribulation," "I know where thou dwellest," there may be an illustration of the tenderness of Christ. Smyrna and Pergamos were the two persecuted churches, the "churches under the cross." When we are in bitter, actual suffering, doing sinks for the present out of view, bearing seems all that we are able for. Christ deals gently with us then; He does not ask for what the tried spirit is too weak to attempt; He does not call us into judgment. He throws upon us, not so much the light that makes manifest (John iii. 21), as the light that cheers and comforts. He tells us *then*—not that he knows our doings, but that He knows our tribulations—knows where we dwell. And we have here, in conclusion, a three-fold word. Christ says to each of us, "I know thy doings," "I know thy sufferings," "I know thy circumstances."

III. **Praise, blame, and promise** (ch. ii. 2-7, &c.; Matt. xxv. 21; Rev. iii. 19; 2 Pet. i. 4). In all moral training praise and blame are chief factors. They are much more effectual than mere exhortation. "You ought to do so and so," impresses far less than "You have done well, or ill." We can only learn to act by *acting*. Exhortation is useless till we begin to put it in practice; and when we do, just and wise praise and blame teach us to amend our failures, and to make our partial successes "stepping stones to higher things." In the Christian life we begin as babes, but the babe soon becomes the growing child, subject to discipline, a pupil in the school of Christ. So we have here Christ exercising moral discipline, educating His scholars by praise and blame. Of the seven churches, two, Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive only praise from

Him, two others, Sardis and Laodicea, only blame (save that in the case of Sardis a few honourable exceptions are made, iii. 4). The remaining three, Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira, receive partly praise, partly censure. Of these three, Ephesus and Thyatira are nearly perfect contrasts, while Pergamos resembles Thyatira. It has been observed that the letters to Ephesus, Pergamos, Sardis, and Laodicea (the first, third, fourth, and seventh of the group), contain each a direct call to repentance. We still find the same varieties of character in the family of God. There are *obedient* children (1 Peter i. 14)—children that walk so as to please the Father (1 Thess. iv. 1); there are also the disobedient and the froward, who require reproof and chastisement. We must remember, too, that these letters were addressed to *churches*;—communities, in which there were many merely professing christians, members of the visible church, and in that sense branches of the Vine, which however, having no real living union with the root, would, if unrepentant, be cast forth and burned (John xv. 6).

Looking upon the sin around us, and the sin within us, we can quite well understand Christ reproving; but Christ praising is a more difficult thought to realise. Yet it is not these letters only which hold out before His servants the inspiring hope of winning His praise (see Matt. xxv. 21, 23, 34-40; Luke xix. 17; 1 Cor. iv. 5). His full recognition and commendation awaits every proof of faithfulness, every act of love, however small. None is unknown to Him, however unknown to the world around; none forgotten by Him, however forgotten even by the doer (Matt. xxv. 37-39). This praise of Christ is amongst the brightest hopes set before us, amongst the highest joys to which the loving heart can look forward. Because it is Christ's recognition that *we have given joy to Him*. Nor will it, as the praise of man may



sometimes do, feed pride and self-esteem, but rather bow down the heart in adoring humility. For the faithful servant will know that Christ is only crowning and rewarding the grace He has Himself bestowed (1 Cor. iv. 7). "*They* are worthy," says Christ of those who shall walk with Him in white (iii. 4). "*Thou* art worthy" is what they say (v. 9). Are we disposed to envy Smyrna and Philadelphia and the others the *present* praise of their Lord, and to think, what should we not be able to do and suffer if thus encouraged and rewarded, whilst still in the midst of our conflict here, by the voice of the risen and ascended Christ? What they had we shall have, if faithful, only in fuller and richer measure. Nay, we have a foretaste of it even here; there is a sense in which His faithful servants do actually receive present praise of Christ. Does He not—when we bear trial, resist temptation, or face duty bravely for His sake and in His strength—give us a present recompence? Does not His hand touch us, His voice whisper in our ears, His peace fill our hearts? Then "we walk in the light" (1 John i. 7; iii. 21, 22). His love is manifested towards us, and felt by us. He answers us in the joy of our hearts (Eccles. v. 20). Note, in all these letters, how generous and ungrudging is the praise of Christ, how tender and considerate His blame. When there is anything at all to praise, He always begins with praise (ii. 2, 3, 13, 19). Here we have not only a specimen of His dealings with us, but an example for our dealings with others. If we have to distribute praise and blame, let us do it faithfully, generously, lovingly. Let the law that is on our tongue be "the law of kindness" (Prov. xxxi. 26). Whenever we can, let us, as Christ does here, *begin* with praise; cordial, though of course always truthful. Many a time has a whole life been brightened and strengthened by a few words of wise commendation from some



admired and trusted source. As our praise should be cordial, so also our reproof,—when reproof is really needful, and we are in a position to administer it,—should be fearless and faithful, though always in the spirit of love and meekness (Lev. xix. 17 ; Gal. vi. 1).

Praise naturally leads on to promise, its frequent accompaniment. All Scripture abounds in promise ; and no part more than this, its concluding book. Each of these seven letters ends with a special promise, introduced with the words, “To him that overcometh.” But in addition to this, Smyrna has one, Sardis one, Philadelphia two, and even lukewarm Laodicea the very beautiful one contained in iii. 20. It is only the concluding promises, however, that we can notice now. Taken separately, each has a special application to the character or the circumstances of the church, or to both (as we shall see hereafter). Taken collectively they form a beautiful chain of promise, linking together the whole story of the ransomed Church, from the Garden of Eden to the throne of God Himself. *First*, we have Christ restoring that access to the tree of life which was lost in the beginning by the sin of man (ii. 7) ; *second*, Christ overcoming that death which came into the world by sin (ii. 11) ; *third*, Christ restoring the lost communion and friendship with God (ii. 17), this promise also containing an allusion to the manna which fed the Church in the wilderness ; *fourth*, after the promise of communion comes the promise of dominion over the world (ii. 26, 27), while the *fifth* promise raises us to heaven, and shows us the Book of Life, and the name of the victor written there, and confessed before the Father and His angels (iii. 5). In the *sixth* we have the New Jerusalem, which has replaced the lost Eden, with the blessed difference that he who enters there shall go out no more for ever (iii. 12). *Lastly*, we have the magnificent promise, which fitly ter-

minates the whole, and almost transcends human thought and imagination, that of sitting with Christ on His throne, as He sits with the Father.

IV. "He that overcometh," and "He that hath ears," Rev. ii. 7, &c. (Eph. vi. 12, 13; Matt. xiii. 16-23). The words "he that overcometh," which are prefixed to each of the seven promises, show that in each the character rewarded is the same, though the special reward promised to each may be different. In ch. xxi. 7, we have the same phrase used in a manner which binds up all the gems of promise into a single chaplet, to crown the head of the conqueror. "All things," include all the promises, which are "yea and amen" to us in Christ Jesus. The phrase "He that overcometh" implies conflict, and that conflict *present* and *continuous*. Not "he that hath overcome," or "he that shall overcome," but he that is overcoming now, and so continues till the end. We are thus reminded that the Christian's life is a conflict, a warfare (Eph. v. 12). It is so spoken of throughout Scripture, and experience confirms the testimony. What then are the objects and the conditions of this conflict? We ask (1) For what are we fighting? (2) Who are our foes? (3) How are we to carry on the warfare? (1) We are *not* fighting for life, for pardon, for salvation from the wrath of God. These blessings are our's already—as soon as we believe—from the beginning of our Christian conflict. They are free gifts; the spoils of that victory which Christ won for us (John iii. 36; Rom. v. 1; 1 John ii. 12). We are fighting, not to be saved and forgiven, but to serve and please Him who has saved and forgiven us already—Christ our Captain; and to realise in our hearts and lives the blessings He has come to bring us. The land of promise is ours already, but because it *is* ours, therefore we must "go up and possess it" (Josh,

xxiii. 4, 5, 6). (2.) See Eph. vi. 12. Our enemies are around, above, beneath us,—dim, mysterious, powerful,—spirits of evil, perhaps also spiritual forces which we apprehend but vaguely, and comprehend not at all,—most formidable antagonists tempting us to sin, and whispering suggestions of wickedness. We have also to reckon with the world (John xv. 18-20 ; 1 John iii. 13). Worse even than its open enmity are the insidious snares and seductions of its friendship (1 John ii. 15-17 ; James iv. 4). Yet the sin that is within us, our own evil nature, called “the flesh” in Scripture language (Gal. v. 16-21 ; Rom. vii. 25 ; viii. 1, &c.), is our most formidable antagonist ; for it is ever with us. In the believer it is not dominant (Rom. vi. 11), nor obeyed (Rom. viii. 4, 5), but condemned (Rom. viii. 3), mortified (Col. iii. 5), crucified—put to a lingering death of pain and shame (Gal. v. 24). Still it is there and will be, until “having done all, we stand” (Eph. vi. 14) before Him who has engaged to “present us faultless” to His Father in the Divine glory “with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). (3.) For the power by which we overcome, see Rev. xii. 11. For our Leader, Heb. ii. 10. For our armour, defensive and offensive, Rom. xiii. 12 ; 2 Cor. vi. 7, x. 4 ; Eph. vi. 11-18. For the secret of our strength, 2 Cor. xii. 9 ; Phil. iv. 13.

The significant declaration “He that hath ears,” &c., occurs in all the seven letters. In the first three it precedes, in the last four it follows the promise, and concludes the letter. It emphatically declares, what we have assumed throughout, that all which is said here to the churches is meant for the whole Church throughout all time. The seven-fold repetition gives the declaration seven-fold force ; and the place, next to the promises, seems intended to encourage the timid and trembling heart, which might shrink from appropriating such wonderful blessings. There is a further lesson



contained in the allusion to the *hearing ear*, the ear opened by the Spirit of God, which all have not (see Isa. xliii. 8). Our Lord used the same expression in His teaching while on earth, St Matt. xi. 15, xiii. 9, &c. ; in xiii. 15 He implies that we have an awful power to close our ears to the voice of God. Let us then take heed that we have the opened ear, and that we listen when He speaks to us (Isa. l. 5). Notice, in conclusion, that what Christ saith "These things saith He," &c., is also what "the Spirit saith unto the churches." The Spirit of Christ speaks the words of Christ: when we hear the voice of One, we hear the voice of Both. The Son reveals the Father, the Spirit reveals the Son; and Father, Son, and Spirit are One.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS (Rev. ii. 1-7).

**I. Previous History of the Ephesian Church,** Acts xix. ; xx. 17 to end (Acts xviii. 18-26 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9 ; Eph. i. 1 ; 1 Tim. i. 3). If we were now to seek out—in the narrow marshy plain through which the little river Cayster winds its way—the remains of the once great city of Ephesus, we should find only broken, shapeless ruins ; here the relics of a vast amphitheatre, there a frieze, or a shattered column, or a tumbled heap of stones. A reed-covered morass represents the harbour, and is washed by the lonely bay, whereon "there goes no galley with oars, neither does gallant ship pass thereby." A strange contrast to this scene of desolation was that Ephesus upon whose shrines and palaces St John looked back when he was leaving it for his exile in the lonely isle of Patmos. It was one of the greatest, busiest, and wealthiest cities of antiquity, capital (as has been said already) of the rich province of Asia. Yet the Ephesian of St John's time, or St Paul's, did not account *this* the



especial glory of his native city. If asked why he was proud of being an Ephesian, he would have told you that Ephesus was the temple-keeper, or warden, of the great goddess Diana, Acts xix. 35, R.V. This temple of Diana (Greek, Artēmis) was celebrated throughout the world for its magnificence. An older one, accounted one of the seven wonders of the world, was burned to the ground on the night Alexander the Great was born. But it was replaced by a new one, far grander and more costly. This vast edifice consisted of a splendid series of colonnades open to the sky, and enclosing a small covered inner shrine, wherein was carefully guarded the image said to have fallen from Jupiter; 127 magnificent pillars—shafts of most costly and precious marble, each the gift of a king—supported these colonnades. Time would fail to tell of the priceless adornments, the triumphs of painting and sculpture, lavished upon this temple. It was not only a great centre of the idolatry of the ancient world: it was also a sanctuary, an exhibition, and a bank. Here were assembled trophies and rarities from every part of the known world; here men brought their gold and silver and precious stones for safe keeping. The “silver shrines” of Acts xix. 24 were small models of this temple, which visitors used to bring home with them either as souvenirs, or as amulets. Every year there was a great festival in honour of Diana, with games presided over by the Asiarchs of Acts xix. 31, R.V., margin; and multitudes of strangers flocked to the city to take part in the idolatrous worship of which it was the stronghold. Into this centre of heathenism, however, the word of God found early entrance. There, as in other great cities of the Roman Empire, Greek-speaking Jews were numerous. They formed a prepared seed plot for the Gospel; in their synagogues it was preached first, and their previous training and knowledge qualified them to search the

Scriptures and "try whether these things were so" (Acts xvii. 11). Accordingly we find St Paul reasoning in the synagogue of Ephesus (Acts xix. 8). But he soon departed, and then the Alexandrian Jew, Apollos, took up the work (Acts xviii. 24-28). Himself imperfectly instructed, but eminently honest and zealous, he taught the truth so far as he knew it. The faithful teacher was at the same time the eager and docile learner. The eloquent Alexandrian, not only mighty in the Scriptures, but learned no doubt in all the philosophy for which his native city was so famous, did not disdain to sit at the feet of the humble companions of St Paul, and to learn the way of the Lord more perfectly, even from the lips of a woman. Ere long he passed over into Achaia; but he left behind him traces of his work, which may have formed the nucleus of the Church planted soon afterwards by St Paul himself (Acts xix. 1-4, on ver. 2 see the R.V.). Ephesus now enjoyed signal advantages (Acts xix. 8-11), nor did the seed fall upon unfruitful ground (vv. 18-20). Note the "first love" of these Ephesian converts (see also 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9). The storm of opposition evoked (Acts xix. 23 to end; 1 Cor. xv. 32, may perhaps refer to this period), was at once a testimony to the remarkable spread of the Gospel (see ver. 27), and a means of sifting, purifying, and consolidating the infant Church. Though now deprived of the presence of their great teacher, the touching narrative of ch. xx. 17-38, shows that this Church possessed a band of regularly ordained elders (presbyters, called also bishops, ver. 28), abounding in zeal and love, and competent to take that oversight of an evidently large and growing community which was so solemnly committed to them. But this charge was by no means the end of the great apostle's labour for the Church of Ephesus. After the usual apostolic custom, he appointed Timothy, "his own son in the faith," to be her overseer (1 Tim. i. 3), and wrote

him a pastoral letter (1st epistle to Timothy), full of special directions for the two parts of his important office, the *teaching* and the *ruling* of the Church of God. Moreover, he addressed to the Ephesian converts the beautiful epistle that bears their name (Eph. i. 1), an epistle full of the deep things of God, and the mysteries of His grace ; and which, in all ages, has been the special treasure of the most advanced pupils in the school of Christ. "Unto him that hath shall be given ;" we may learn much of a person's character by what is written or spoken *to him* ; and thus we may certainly conclude that the Ephesians addressed by St Paul had "their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. v. 13, 14). He speaks highly of their faith and love (Eph. i. 15, 16). Moreover, it was to the chief pastor of Ephesus that he wrote what were probably his last words to the Church on earth (see 2 Tim. iv. 6-8). We may be sure that bishop, elders, and people mingled their tears over the letter that told them their great teacher was now "ready to be offered, and the time of his departure at hand." The elders would remember the parting at Miletus, and the holy words of counsel spoken there ; whilst humbler members of the flock would take comfort from the declaration that the crown of righteousness their pastor was about to receive was within the reach of *all* who love their Lord's appearing. And when at last the tidings of his martyrdom reached his favourite Church, how would the hearts of Ephesian Christians burn within them, that they also might "obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. ii. 10). But not yet was ended the long roll of Ephesian privilege. Paul having won his crown, and Timothy having been removed from amongst them, probably by martyrdom (the date and circumstances are unknown), St John came finally to take up his abode in Ephesus, and thence to regulate the affairs of the



Asiatic Churches. Thus what St Paul planted, St John watered, and the favoured disciples of both had much need to remember that "privilege is responsibility to the uttermost fraction," and that "unto whom men have committed much, from him they will ask the more."

II. **Sound in faith and diligent in works**, Rev. ii. vv. 3, 6 (Acts xx. 27-31; Eph. i. 15, 16; 2 Tim. i. 13). This is certainly what the Head of the Church had a right to expect. He had bestowed especial care upon this vineyard, and He might well look that it should bring forth choice grapes (Isa. v. 1, 2). It did not wholly disappoint him. When He finds much fruit He rejoices, He enjoys it (Cant. iv. 16; v. 1). He is generous and unstinted in praise and in recompence. Christ here describes Himself not only as having but as "holding" the stars, not only as in the midst of the candlesticks but as "walking" in their midst (compare ch. i. 13, 20 with ii. 1). "The words express the unwearied activity of Christ in His Church, moving up and down in the midst of it." He gives the Church of Ephesus no less than three weighty words of praise, which, taken together, seem to cover the whole field of Christian life. He praises her (1) for *doing*, (2) for *bearing*, and (3) for *proving*. (1.) "I know thy labour," *i.e.*, thy toil, even unto weariness. Theirs was no barren, empty profession. The faith they had received bore fruit in good works and labours of love, which God was "not unrighteous" to forget (Heb. vi. 10). So it had been from the first (Acts xix. 19), when the love which glowed within them yearned to prove itself by sacrifice; so had they learned from the precept and example of St Paul (Acts xx. 34, 35). The deep and high teaching addressed to them in his epistle had its outcome and application in the plainest practical precepts (Eph. v., vi.), and these were carefully followed. So should it ever be with the study of the



deep things of God, and so it ever is, when that study is rightly pursued.

“The lark that soars on highest wing,  
Builds on the ground her lowly nest.”

They who know most of the secrets of His mind will be the most careful to “walk even as He walked ;” and the most earnest in evidencing their faith by practical work for Him. They not only work, but labour even unto weariness, and yet they do *not* grow weary (ver. 3, R.V.), because of the motive, “for my name’s sake,” which turns labour and endurance into joy. (2.) Labour is easier than patience, doing easier than suffering—at least to most temperaments. But in the Christian life we have need of both. The patience of Ephesian Christians is commended twice,—nay, three times, since bearing and “having patience” are the same—a three-fold cord of praise. No doubt they had much to bear ; we may be sure the tumult of Acts xix. was no solitary instance of heathen opposition, provoked by fanaticism or self-interest, or, as happens very frequently, by a mixture of both. They were probably sufferers from the persecution under Domitian, of which John himself, according to tradition, was a victim. It was much to their praise, therefore, that they showed themselves patient in tribulation, remembering the “faithful saying” addressed to their chief pastor (2 Tim. ii. 11, 12). But it is not only in the endurance of persecution for His sake that patience, acceptable in the sight of Christ, may be shown. If we bear His will, whatever it may be, and however hard and painful to flesh and blood, *because it is His will*, with loving and trusting hearts, we also shall not fail of our reward and recognition. Doing His will and bearing it are, as it were, the two sides of Christian duty. In our own strength we are incapable of fulfilling either, but He makes us strong for both (Phil. iv. 13 ;

2 Cor. xii. 9). (3.) The Church of Ephesus bore much, but there was one thing she could not and would *not* bear, and for this *not* bearing—this intolerance—she receives also warm commendation ; our Lord returning to the subject, even after severe rebuke (ver. 6). She proved the teachers that came to her, their doctrines and their deeds ; and when these were evil she rejected them, and hated (it is not said the persons, but) their deeds. Soundness of doctrine, or rejection of error, seems to have been in an especial manner the “note” or mark of this Church. We see here the fruit of the warnings, as also the fulfilment of the prophecies, addressed to her through her elders (Acts xx. 28-30), and through her chief pastor (1 Tim. iv. 1-4 ; 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4). Thus warned and forewarned, thus instructed and prayed for, she was faithful to her Great Shepherd (John x. 5). What were the special forms of error taught by the false apostles, we can only guess from a general knowledge of the heresies of the early Church. Amongst *Gentile* Christians these were usually various forms of Gnosticism. A common feature of these schemes (frequently grotesque and monstrous) was the denial of our Lord’s proper divinity, and also of His real humanity (see 1 John ii. 22, 23, and iv. 3). Another was the permitting men to indulge in sin, and notably in idolatrous rites and licentious excesses, so long as their belief was thought to be correct. This last was doubtless the characteristic of the Nicolaitanes (vv. 6 and 15), whose deeds are so emphatically condemned. Tradition connects these Nicolaitanes with Nicolas the deacon (Acts vi. 5) ; and in the succeeding century there certainly arose a sect assuming the name of this Nicolas, who had been the companion of Apostles. But, though this was a not uncommon opinion among writers belonging to the end of the second century and later, it seems to have been

without foundation. It was disavowed, indeed, by some of those early authorities, while others substituted another Nicolas for the deacon. We naturally connect the Nicolaitanes of vv. 6 and 15 with the Balaamites of ver. 14, who showed just the characteristics we should expect; and this has been supposed by some to be confirmed by the fact that Nicolas in the Greek bears the same meaning as Balaam in the Hebrew, "Destroyer of the people." Old forms of error reappear in different conditions and under different names in every epoch of the Church's history; and it was, and is, the duty of believers to "prove all things" by the Word of God (1 Thess. v. 21; Isa. viii. 20), and to hold fast that which is good.

III. **The beginning of backsliding**, Rev. ii. 4, 5 (Jer. ii. 2; iii. 22; Hos. xiv. 1-8). So much there was to praise, yet also somewhat, and that no light thing, to blame; "the little speck within the garnered fruit," the beginning of declension. Notice here (1) the remonstrance, v. 3; (2) the exhortation, "Remember;" (3) the threat, "or else," &c. (1.) There was no outward change—"doing," "bearing," and "proving," went on as heretofore; yet He who walked in the midst of the candlesticks observed the first signs of dimness in this lamp, which was no longer fed, as it was wont to be, by fresh supplies of oil from within the sanctuary. Thus it ever is, declension begins within—it is unseen by others, perhaps even unnoticed by ourselves (see Hosea vii. 9). There is no falling off (*for the present*) in the works of faith and labours of love so joyfully undertaken at first; the same things are done, but not under the same impulse, or in the same way. Is this the case with any of us? Then see (2) the exhortation. Compare Jer. ii. 2. *Christ* remembers that first love we perhaps have forgotten. Its warmth, devotion, self-forgetting sacrifice were pleasing in His eyes. He recalls



them tenderly with yearning love, and would have us recall them too. See the many touching invitations to backsliders in the Old Testament, especially in the book of Hosea. "*Repent.*" [Note that Repentance means change of mind—turning—in this instance *returning* to Him who is our rest, Ps. cxvi. 7.] "*Do the first works,*" for the latter, though the same in our own eyes and in man's, are not the same in His, who sees the heart. (3.) *Or else, &c.,* Christ's coming does not mean here His personal Coming (as i. 7), but His coming in judgment. The "candle" or "lamp stand" signifies the visible Church (see chapter iii. section 4), which, in conformity with this threat, was eventually "removed out of its place" in Ephesus; for we have the testimony of history that the Ephesian Church did *not* repent. She retained, indeed, her jealousy for formal orthodoxy. In later years Ephesus was the scene of two General Councils (A.D. 431 and 449), at the first of which the doctrines of Nestorius (that is, the doctrines that disjoined the two natures in our Lord's Person) were condemned. But amidst "the unseemly wranglings and fiercely debated anathemas, and even the actual violence and brutality that disgraced these assemblies," there is little evidence of faith and love, and almost none at all of the mind which was in Christ Jesus. "The carnal light of orthodoxy availed not to preserve" the candlestick of Ephesus. "Its light soon faded, and it lingered on, a decaying city, exposed to all the horrors of the ceaseless wars and invasions of the Latin Empire, until finally the Turkish chieftains, Sarukhan and Aidin, in the year A.D. 1312, destroyed it utterly, and the church of St Mary was laid as low as the temple of Diana."—"The Seven Golden Candlesticks," by the Rev. H. B. Tristram.

IV. **The tree of life**, Rev. ii. 7 (Gen. ii. 9; iii. 22-24; Rev. xxii. 2, 14). This beautiful promise, like others in this book, begins with the word of



power, "I will give." Christ asserts His proper Divinity as the giver of all things. He Himself is the best of all gifts, including every other ; and it is Himself He gives here. We may regard Him as the Tree of Life (1) recompensing special faithfulness with a special reward ; (2) restoring what was lost by sin ; (3) fulfilling every need and longing of our nature. (1.) In Ephesus "He that overcometh" had, as the special test of his faithfulness, to keep himself pure, even at the cost of his life, from the old idolatry ; and, in particular, from the feasts and mystic rites of which the temple of Diana was the scene. The very heart and centre of that magnificent temple, the very focus of its idolatry, was the small dark covered shrine, within which, in darkness and mystery, was guarded "the image that fell down from Jupiter." This was no marvel of sculpture, no triumph of Grecian art, but (according to the almost invariable rule of superstition), a rude, uncouth, hideous figure. In fact Ephesus, though a Grecian city, was on Asiatic soil, and the worship of Diana or Artemis was the relic of that of Astarté, an earlier and more degraded Asiatic superstition. The sacred image was that of a female, small, rude, and hideous, with an immense number of breasts, and ending in a shapeless mass. In this uncouth fashion was represented not so much Diana, as Astarté, the mother and *life-giver* of all. In magnificent contrast, Christ offers the faithful Ephesian—for the dark shrine in the temple, "the midst of the paradise of God ;"—for the dead and hideous image, the living Tree ; for the false and fabled life Astarté promised but could not give, the true and everlasting life He gives His own. (2.) The allusion to Gen. iii. has been touched upon before (see the introduction), and the thought is carried on in ch. xxii. 2, 14. The Tree stands *in the midst*, accessible at all times, and to all. The Persian word "paradise," originally

meaning merely a garden, was first appropriated to the Garden of Eden, in which Adam was placed. Then the signification took a step higher—the word was applied to the happy separate state, wherein the blessed “await their full consummation and bliss” (Luke xxiii. 43). Lastly, it reaches its highest significance here, when used to mean the “third Heaven,” the home of God Himself, where His redeemed shall dwell with Him for ever. That home now finds its fitting symbol not in a garden but in a city (ch. xxii. 2, 14), the dwelling, not of the isolated and solitary, but of an innumerable company; the place not only of joy and glory unutterable, but of fellowship and communion with God and with His saints. To all who enter there He gives life, and this life is in His Son (John vi. 57). (3.) We turn now from the Paradise and the Tree to the significant word “to eat.” It is thus that the eternal life which is in Christ is appropriated here; and as we gather from the promise before us, and the parallel passages in Rev. xxii., it is thus that it will continue to be appropriated hereafter. Christ, who gives us that life, and who sustains it here, will sustain it there for ever. It is by means of the union of the soul with Him, that the life which is in Him flows into us. The condition of that union is faith—by faith we partake of Christ, feed upon Him (John vi. 35). (Of this feeding on Christ the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is the highest type and symbol. Therein, if we partake in faith, we do “spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood.”) There is much significance in the three figures under which Christ presents Himself as the food of the soul. He is the *bread*; the staff of life, the necessary sustenance, the food for every day, to be partaken of daily; He is the bread *broken*, in His humanity, His flesh, which he gives for the life of the world. But He is *manna* as well as bread; the

human is joined to the Divine—this is “the bread which came down from Heaven,” it is supernatural, mysterious, “angel’s food,” for marvel as well as for sweetness. Lastly, as here, He is the *fruit* of the mystic tree, which grows in no earthly garden. Fruit is not mere sustenance, as bread may be, it is luxury and enjoyment ; pleasant and refreshing to the taste, partaken of, not because we must, lest we should die of hunger, but because we like it. Christ is not our life alone, but our joy. Feeding upon Him by faith, our hearts are glad ; we rejoice “with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” And He, who is our joy here, shall be, not less, but unutterably more to us, when we see Him as He is. The manna ceased when the children of Israel ate the new corn of the land of Canaan ; it is only “till He come” that we are to show forth His death by partaking of the bread and wine, its hallowed symbols ; but in the New Jerusalem, and to the untold ages of eternity, our glad unending life shall be sustained by eating of the fruit of the Tree which is in the midst of the garden of God. We shall feed for ever upon Him who is here, and who shall be there, “our exceeding joy.”

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA (Rev. ii. 8-11).

I. **Tribulation and poverty borne patiently**, Rev. ii. 9 (1 Peter i. 7 ; 2 Cor. iv. 17 ; Col. i. 11). The church of Smyrna, unlike that of Ephesus, is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. This once only her record flashes into unique and sudden brightness, illumined by the praise of Christ Himself—praise unalloyed by a single word of censure. Probably less privileged than Ephesus, she would seem to have outstripped Ephesus in the Christian race. But then she was pre-eminently a suffering church. Christ had laid His cross upon her ; and He always

richly rewards those whom He finds willing to bear it after Him. There is a "peculiar nearness to Christ which those know who suffer for Him ;" an "exceeding great reward" given them even here and now. The word Smyrna is another form of the Greek "Myrrha," Myrrh ; and the analogy with the perfume which gives out its sweetness when crushed, and which went up as incense before the Lord when placed in the censer and exposed to the fire, has been often noticed, and is not too fanciful to be interesting. Of the city in which the church had its dwelling place, it may suffice to say that Alexander the Great was its reputed founder ; that it was built near an earlier Smyrna which was so ancient that we know it to have passed from the Æolian Greeks to the Romans in the year B.C. 688, and to have prided itself on having been the birthplace of Homer (though its claim was disputed) ; that it was celebrated for its great wealth, which was mainly derived from commerce ; and also for its beauty, which won for it the epithets of "the lovely," and "the crown of Ionia." As it was not far from Ephesus, and there was constant intercourse between the two, we may readily conclude that the seed of the Gospel was borne early from the one great city to the other. In fact the first ray of light church history sheds upon Smyrna shews us a disciple of St John occupying the seat of the teacher. We cannot hold it as absolutely proved, but there is reason to believe, that the "blessed and apostolic presbyter," whom Irenaeus many years afterwards described from his childish recollections, was that very "angel of the church of Smyrna," addressed here by our Lord. "I can tell," writes Irenaeus, in the latter part of the second century, "the very place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit and discourse : his entrances, his walks, the complexion of his life, the form of his body, his conversations with the people, and his familiar intercourse



with St John, as also his familiarity with those who had seen the Lord." We know that Polycarp was already bishop of Smyrna at the time of the martyrdom of his friend Ignatius, which was only a few years subsequent to the later date assigned to the Apocalypse. Polycarp saw and conferred with Ignatius when that aged servant of Christ passed through Smyrna as a captive, on the way to his martyrdom in the Amphitheatre of Rome, and to him Ignatius addressed one of the "epistles," which have been the subject of so much controversy. He himself wrote an epistle to the church of Philippi, which is still extant, and contains earnest exhortations to steadfastness of faith and diligence in duty. We may then look upon these words of our Lord as addressed probably to him, certainly to his friends, companions, and fellow disciples. For the introduction, ver. 8, see ch. IV., section I. "*I know thy tribulation,*" literally *threshing*, the word being derived from a Latin term denoting a heavy sledge, armed with sharp points, which was dragged over corn for threshing purposes. Here it means the sharp oppression the Christians of Smyrna endured from their heathen and Jewish adversaries. But we may take it in a wider sense for our own comfort; and believe that every care and sorrow His people have to bear, every pressure of circumstances, oppression from without, or depression from within, is "known" and sympathised with by our great High Priest. "*And thy poverty.*" These Christians of Smyrna dwelt in a city renowned for its wealth, and where the means of acquiring wealth were numerous and abundant, yet poverty was amongst their trials, either because they belonged for the most part to the poor and indigent classes (and this we know was frequently the case with the early Christians, see James ii. 5), or because, like the Hebrew Christians (Hebrews x. 34), they had endured for the sake of Christ, "the spoiling of their

goods," a very common form of persecution in those days. "*But thou art rich*" in the true wealth, the treasure which none could take from them. Rich in that which was real, eternal, and glorious beyond human thought or vision ; rich in faith (James ii. 5), rich towards God (Luke xii. 21), rich in the blessing of the Lord (Prov. x. 22). Yet their present poverty was a real, keenly felt trial, which our Lord acknowledges, and with which He sympathises. We well know that it is so ; poverty has a sting, and this sting is all the keener for those who (as may have been the case with some of the persecuted Christians of Smyrna) have enjoyed competence and lost it ; also for those who are surrounded by evidences of the wealth of others. Our Lord here shows His sympathy for all His people who are thus exercised ; whilst reminding them that they may be at the same time truly "rich," as well in what they have already in Him, as in what they shall receive when they obtain the reward of the inheritance. An interesting side light is thrown upon this word of our Lord's by the story recorded of Polycarp, that a large fortune was bequeathed to him, but that he expended it all in works of charity, retaining nothing for himself (see St Luke xviii. 22). The Christians of Smyrna were tried in *all* ways ; in their persons by tribulation, in their circumstances by poverty, in their reputations by calumny ; an engine very frequently turned in those days against the followers of Christ. The early Christians were accused of all sorts of unnatural crimes, and the malice of the heathen was aroused against them by monstrous stories of the abominations they were supposed to practise in their secret assemblies. Such calumny, or "reviling," is called blasphemy ; the Lord takes what is said or done against His people as said or done against Himself (Acts ix. 4 ; 1 Sam. viii. 7 ; Zech. ii. 8). It is here traced to the Jews. Those Jews who re-

jected Christ—and they formed the large majority of the nation—became the most bitter and determined opponents of Christianity. Christ says of these Jews by birth, that they were “not” Jews; having forfeited their birthright and their place amongst the children of Abraham by their unbelief (see Rom. ii. 28, 29), but the synagogue, or assembly, of Satan, the great adversary. Note, that the word synagogue is never applied to a Christian assembly save in James ii. 2 (marg.), the nobler word, ecclesia, being soon adopted and consecrated to this purpose. We recognise here the same voice which, while on earth, uttered the terrible words of St John viii. 44. The Jews, by their rejection of Christ, placed themselves under the power of His adversary the devil; whose work they did, especially when, as here, they persecuted the people of Christ. The hostility of the Smyranean Jews to the Christians, and the active share they took in their persecution, are matter of history. One of their “calumnies” has come down to us—they urged the pro-consul not to give up to the Christians the body of the martyr Polycarp, saying that “they would leave the worship of the Crucified, and go to worship him.”

II. **Faithful unto death**, Rev. ii. 10 (Heb. x. 23; 1 Thess. v. 24; Dan. iii. 25; Matt. xxv. 23). Our Lord’s way of comforting His chosen under trial and suffering differs much from that of the world. He does not prophesy smooth things, saying, “It will soon be over,” “Better days are coming,” &c. Far from this, He foretells yet keener suffering at hand, for He foresees the future with unerring glance; and what He knows He tells, as the true and faithful witness, concealing nothing, promising nothing He cannot fulfil. He foretells suffering, yet bids the sufferer “Fear not.” The word spoken by Him is a word of power; it can take the fear out of the heart of him who receives it. For “faith is the grave of fear.” Sore were the trials foretold for



His faithful ones in Smyrna, dark the clouds that were to envelop them. Oppression, poverty, and calumny they were suffering already ; but imprisonment, deeper tribulation, death itself were still before them. The "prison" here foretold would indeed be a frightful trial. We know from records which have come down to us that hunger and thirst, cold and darkness, privations and sufferings of every kind were employed by the heathens to force the imprisoned confessors to deny the Faith ; they were cast into prison on purpose that they might be tried, *i.e.*, tempted to forsake Christ. This is here ascribed by our Lord to the agency of Satan, the great tempter and adversary (compare Job i.; Luke xiii. 16 ; 2 Cor. xii. 7). We know that he is sometimes permitted, in the mysterious Providence of God, to inflict bodily disease and suffering, even on the saints. Here we find him working on the minds of wicked men, intensifying their hatred to the Church, and impelling them to acts of cruelty against it. But the child of God may look beyond the malice of Satan, to Him whose love makes that malice itself only one of the things that shall work together for our good. The great adversary, like every other, is but a weapon in the hand of God (Isaiah x. 5, 15) ; it may be a rod to chastise His people, it may be but a knife to sever cords that bind them, and so to bring them into fuller liberty. The exact significance of the "ten days" of foretold tribulation has been much disputed. Some think it means ten *years*, because there is reason to suppose that in the prophetic parts of this book a day is put for a year. Others think they see an allusion to the "ten persecutions," as commonly reckoned, of the Christians under the Roman empire. Some of these persecutions were only local and partial ; and moreover they did not affect the Church of Smyrna more than any other of the churches, either in Asia or elsewhere. It is far more likely that "ten



days" is here used to express a short time (see 2 Cor. iv. 17), and also a *definite* and determined time. Satan's power is limited in duration as well as in extent. Christ all the while is watching over His Church; He will not leave the silver in the furnace one moment longer than is necessary to attain the end He has in view. See Mal. iv. 3. (It is said the purifier watches the metal in the furnace till he sees his own image reflected there; then he knows that his work is done.) There is great comfort in realizing, not only the shortness of a time of trial, but its *definiteness*. We are apt to think one weary day and night follows another indefinitely or interminably, because *we* see no termination. But in truth all are measured and numbered. Each one that passes or falls leaves one less to follow; and it is Christ who is watching and keeping the account, and He will make no mistakes. The climax of tribulation was to be death itself, endured for Christ's sake. "Faithful unto death" does not here mean simply *until* death, in which sense it would be an exhortation equally suitable to all believers at all times, but unto the suffering of death itself. Compare "resisted *unto* blood" (Heb. xii. 4). Note especially the word *faithful*. It may bear, in our own tongue, either of two meanings—full of faith or believing, as contrasted with faithless; worthy of faith or dependable, as contrasted with unfaithful. In Gal. iii. 9, it is used in the sense of believing, but usually, as in the passage before us, it means trustworthy, and contrasts with unfaithful. A deep truth lies hid in this double signification of the word. We cannot be found faithful unless we are first believing, our *faith* is the root of our *faithfulness*. Yet, further, our faith rests upon Christ's faithfulness as its source and support. Because He is faithful, we can put faith in Him to the uttermost, and this faith enables us also to be found faithful. What Church History

tells us of the faithful martyr to whom the words before us may have been addressed, is a fitting illustration of this truth. When the aged bishop was apprehended, he was led to the amphitheatre, which was filled with a furious multitude thirsting for his blood. But the pro-consul did not share the fanaticism of the mob, and wished to save the noble old man, whose character he evidently respected ; so he urged upon him an easy form of seeming recantation. The Christians were then popularly called Atheists, as they had no visible God ; and to say "Take away the Atheists," was to abjure Christianity. "Only say 'Take away the Atheists !'" urged the pro-consul. Polycarp gazed with deep compassion on the raging crowd before him, then waving his hand over them and raising his eyes to heaven, he prayed earnestly, "Take away the Atheists." "Swear then," said the pro-consul, "Blaspheme Christ, and I will release thee." "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath never wronged me, how then can I blaspheme my King, who hath saved me?" was his brave confession, and it sealed his doom. He was committed to the flames, *the Jews*, it is said, being foremost in collecting fuel for the pile. "Be thou faithful unto death," said the Master. "How can I but be faithful to my faithful King, who never wronged me all my life long?" the servant answered. And we have no doubt the Master rejoined, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

III. The crown of life, Rev. ii. 10 (James i. 12 ; 1 Peter v. 4 ; 2 Tim. iv. 8 ; 1 Cor. ix. 25 ; Isa. xxviii. 5). This was the *special* promise given to meet the special need of the persecuted Christians of Smyrna, over and above the promise to "Him that overcometh," with which the epistle to each of the churches concludes. The thought throughout this epistle is life conquering death, and conquering

through death (verses 8, 10, 11). Here the martyr, whose faithfulness is proved by the last and greatest test, is assured that he (like his Lord, ver. 8) shall pass through death to life, and that the life shall be to him a crown—"the crown of life." There may be here one of those local allusions which, throughout these letters, illustrate our Lord's intimate acquaintance with the surroundings of those whom He addressed. It has been mentioned that the peculiar heathen worship of Smyrna was that of Bacchus, and the celebration of his fabled death and resurrection one of its chief festivals. The priest who presided over these splendid rites used, at the close of his year of office, to be presented with a crown ; and in inscriptions still extant is given the honourable title of "the crown-bearer." There are two Greek words, both of which we render by the English word "crown"—*stephanos* and *diadema*. The latter means a kingly crown ; the insignia of royalty, of dominion. It is used in Rev. xii. 3, xiii. 1, xix. 12, "Christ's many crowns are tokens of the many royalties, of earth, of heaven, and of hell, which are His." But what is promised to the faithful, in our verse and elsewhere, is not dominion, but *glory, victory, gladness*, for of these things the wreath or coronal—*stephanos*—was the sign and token. In that sense there is promised in Scripture (1) the crown of incorruption ; the unfading, amaranthine wreath (1 Cor. ix. 25). The point brought out here is the contrast between the fading coronal (of laurel, olive, &c.), which truly symbolized the fading glory of the victors in the Grecian games, and the glory of the conqueror in the Christian race, which shall last for ever. (2) The crown of righteousness, 2 Tim. iv. 8 ; righteously bestowed by Him who is the righteous Judge, on the victor, through grace, in the good fight. (3) The crown of glory (1 Pet. v. 4). Here the glory and the crown are both put before us, and promised in an

especial manner to faithful pastors. That these shall have special joy we are told elsewhere ; also that this joy shall consist in bringing others with them to Christ—a faint reflection of His own (Heb. ii. 10, with xii. 2). See for this peculiar crown, which, set upon the brows of those who turn many to righteousness, shall cause them to shine like stars (Phil. iv. 1 ; 2 Thess. ii. 19, 20). But lest any one should think that crowns are *only* for ministers or martyrs, we have the assurance of 2 Tim. iv. 8. (4) The crown of life, as in this verse and in James i. 12. Much more doubtless is meant here than that the life given up for Christ shall be restored, never again to be lost ; the life everlasting shall be “glory, honour, immortality,” joy unutterable and unending. And all this because of, and in “Christ, who is our life” (Col. iii. 4). Thus Christ Himself is the fulfilment of this promise, as of the others. He Himself is the crown of His people (Isa. xxviii. 5). He is their life, their righteousness, their glory, their joy. It seems more wonderful that *they* should be *His* crown, but this also is told us. Isa. lxii. 3. (Compare with 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20). How inspiring the thought that we—even we—can bring Him honour, glory, joy ! The promise in our text, from its terms, is clearly for the future ; yet there is a sense in which the servants of God are crowned already. They are crowned, even now, “with loving kindness and tender mercies” (Ps. ciii. 4), and it is this present crown of grace which gives them strength for the conflict, after which they shall attain the future crown of glory.

IV. **Not hurt of the second death**, Rev. ii. 8, 11 (1 Cor. xv. 56, 57 ; John viii. 51, 52). Still the same thought is kept before the mind of the Christian of Smyrna, standing face to face with death. “This death which is before you is all you have to dread ; after that no more death, but life everlasting” (Luke xii. 4). The Greek is emphatic, “it



gives great precision and certainty to the promise ; there is no chance that you should be hurt of it." The faithful shall not "see," shall not "taste of" death (John viii. 51, 52), for him death has no sting (1 Cor. xv. 56, 57). These passages state the same truth, though the *expression* "the second death" is peculiar to the Apocalypse, occurring only here and in chaps. xx. 6, 14, and xxi. 8. In chap. xx. 14, it is explained as "the lake of fire," the final doom of the unpenitent. It is remarkable that Polycarp, when menaced with the death of fire, made answer, "You threaten me with fire which burns for a moment, but you know not of the judgment to come, and the eternal fire prepared for the wicked." On this awful subject it is best to leave the solemn words of Scripture to the reverent and prayerful consideration of each. Here the main lesson taught is that beyond the death of the body the believer has nothing to fear ; for him there is "no condemnation," no wrath, nothing but life everlasting.

In conclusion, we may remark that this Church, so cordially praised by our Lord, has never, like Ephesus, had her candlestick wholly removed out of its place. The light indeed has been very dim, but Smyrna has never been wholly without at least the profession of the Christian faith ; it has always called itself, and been called by friend and foe, a Christian city, even the Moslems terming it in scorn "the infidel Smyrna." Often taken and retaken, and the scene of great misery and slaughter during the long conflict with the Turks, it remains to this day under Turkish rule, but with a large proportion of native Christian inhabitants. The traveller in those regions may still behold the ruins of the amphitheatre, where Polycarp showed himself "faithful unto death," and will be shown his tomb, still carefully preserved, close by the ruins of an ancient church on the hill-side, and overshadowed by a tall cypress tree.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF PERGAMOS (Rev. ii. 12-17).

I. Truth held fast in adverse circumstances, Rev. ii. 13 (Gen. vi. 9-11 ; Dan. vi. 10 ; Job i. 22 ; Ez. xiv. 14). Pergamos, more properly Pergamum (R.V.), was the seat of an ancient kingdom. Its greatness dates from the time of the successors of Alexander, one of his generals, Lysimachus, having selected it as his stronghold. A subordinate of Lysimachus, named Philetærus, revolted against him, and erected Pergamum into a kingdom ; which, under Eumenes, the successor of Philetærus, was established and strengthened. A line of kings succeeded, who increased its power and glory, and extended the territory attached to it. One of these kings, Eumenes II., collected a magnificent public library, which rivalled that of Alexandria, and was said to contain 700,000 volumes. Being anxious to obtain the best possible material for these MSS., he established a manufactory at Pergamum, in which the skins of animals were carefully prepared for this purpose. These smooth and whitened skins became celebrated all over the world under the name of *Pergamænæ chartæ*, the origin of our word parchment. In the second century (B.C.) the kingdom passed to the Romans ; but at the period of the Apocalypse the city still retained great dignity and importance, from its wealth and splendour, from the possession of the famous library and other monuments of former greatness, and still more from its being the centre of the idolatrous worship of Æsculapius, the heathen god of healing, to whose shrine the sick and infirm from all parts of Asia thronged in hopes of a cure, leaving behind them good store of rich gifts and offerings. Pergamum is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and we have no information of the circumstances under which the church there was founded. But it would

seem, from our Lord's address, that she had already existed for some time, and shown herself faithful in circumstances of exceptional trial. In fact, Pergämun seems to have been the first of the churches in Asia to contribute to the noble army of martyrs; even Smyrna, the only other church then suffering actual persecution, had not yet presumably "resisted unto blood," though such resistance was in the near future. Perhaps it was on this account that Satan's seat (literally, *throne*) was said to be in Pergämun; as Satan is looked upon throughout as the great instigator of persecution (ver. 10). It could scarcely have been simply on account of the pre-eminent wickedness of the heathen Pergamenes, because although every great city contains a truly awful amount of wickedness, and great *heathen* cities presented, and still present, fearful pictures of moral corruption and degradation, we have no reason to suppose that Pergämun was worse in this respect than Ephesus or Smyrna. But it would seem from the mention of Antipas, which follows so closely, that the Pergamenes had added to their sins one of which the others were not yet guilty, even the shedding of that blood which is "precious" in the sight of the Lord (Ps. cxvi. 15). Another explanation has been found in the fact that Æsculapius was worshipped in Pergämun under the figure of a serpent, the type, from the beginning, of the great adversary. "A living serpent was kept and fed in the temple; while the serpent-worship was so marked a character of the place, that we find this reptile engraved on many of its coins." But however we may decide on taking this expression with regard to Pergämun, it bears for us the lesson that Christ is intimately acquainted with our surroundings and circumstances, and should there be anything in these which exposes us to peculiar trial or temptation, He makes tender allowance, and awards double praise if in

spite of all we "hold fast." "Some good thing" towards God found in the household of Jeroboam (1 Kings xiv. 13) was not unnoticed by Him; nay, it was far more precious than greater piety might have been in the court of David or Hezekiah. In those *lesser* trials and difficulties of home-life, which are so individual in each case that no two are exactly alike, and which it is so impossible for outsiders to understand at all, we have also His sympathy, and His help will not be wanting if we seek it (James i. 5). The Antipas mentioned here with such high honour is unknown to authentic Church History. What purports to be an account of his martyrdom does indeed exist, but it is a manifest fable, the invention of a later age. The name was a common one in those regions; a usual abbreviation of Antipäter, like Silas of Silvanus, Luke or Lucas of Lucanus. It was an *obscure* name, and a *common* name, which Christ's finger touched, as with a pencil of light, making it glorious for ever more. Thus it is a type and example of thousands more—

"Names on earth unknown,  
But Jesus bears them on His heart before the eternal  
throne."

Motley, in his "Rise of the Dutch Republic," says of the multitudinous Reformation martyrs of the Low Countries, that "their names, barely pronounced in their life-time, sound barbarously in our ears, and will never ring through the trumpet of fame." Not on earth; but what is earthly fame beside that confession before the Father in heaven, which this naming of Antipas foreshadows? (Matt. x. 32). Christ gives Antipas the same title that He Himself is called by in ch. i. 5 (Luke vi. 40; 1 John iv. 17, last clause). If history is silent about the Pergamene protomartyr Antipas, she chronicles with honour the names of some who followed him. The churches of Asia were, as all



churches ought to be, and all living churches will be, missionary churches. Through their exertions flourishing churches were founded in the Roman colonies of southern Gaul, at Lyons and Vienne, places with which the Asiatic cities maintained constant intercourse. A terrible storm of persecution broke over these churches in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 177), a few years later than the date usually assigned to the martyrdom of Polycarp. Never were witnesses for Christ "strengthened with all might according to His glorious power," to endure all things for Him with more heroic patience than these martyrs of Lyons and Vienne; and amongst their noblest and most honoured names is that of Attalus of Pergămum.

II. **Evil tolerated**, Rev. ii. 14, 15 (Num. xxv. 1-3, with xxxi. 16; 2 Peter ii. 15-19). Christ had "something against" even this church, so steadfast and so warmly praised. It is possible to be really true to Christ, loving Him, seeking to follow Him, willing even to give up life itself for Him; and yet to fall into mistakes which may cloud our joy, cripple our usefulness, and what is worse, grieve Him who loves us so well. We have therefore need to pray with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God" (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24), and earnestly to study His Word, with the aid of His Spirit, that we may know *all* His will, and frame our lives accordingly. These Christians of Pergămum, so faithful and so strenuous in opposing evil from without, yet erred in suffering evil *within* the church. They tolerated what they should have opposed and hated, as did the Church of Ephesus, more faithful in this particular (vv. 2, 6). But, we ask, is not toleration a virtue, to be commended and cultivated? The answer is, that toleration, which means simply *bearing with*, is either a virtue or a fault, according to circumstances. We are to bear with *persons* (Heb. v. 2, marg.), and not only with those who differ from us, but with

those who revile and persecute us; we are to do them no harm, but all the good we can (Matt. v. 44). But we are not to bear with false teaching, contrary to the truth which we have learned of Christ in His Word. We may make full allowance for the good that may be mingled with it, we may hold in personal love and esteem many who advocate it; but we must not be afraid or ashamed to bear witness against it—though always in a meek, prayerful, and loving spirit. The special form of evil borne with by Pergämun was evidently the same as that *not* borne with by Ephesus. If we study the history of Balaam (Num. xxiv., &c.), we shall see that God taught him, by successive lessons, that it was not possible to bring a curse upon Israel, so long as Israel had God for his friend. But as he “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter ii. 15), he wished to please Balak, and thus the idea seems to have occurred to him of making God the enemy of Israel by causing Israel to sin. Hence the diabolical counsel (Num. xxxi. 16), which was only too successful, and which brought a plague upon the congregation of the Lord, though eventually it caused the death of the tempter himself. The two representative sins to which Balaam tempted Israel are named here (ver. 14). They were specially forbidden to the Gentile converts by the council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 20). About things sacrificed to idols, St Paul had given very wise and definite counsels (1 Cor. viii., and xx. 19 to end). But the Gnostic, or Nicolaitan, abused the freedom thus allowed, when, reasoning that an idol, being nothing in the world, could not convey defilement, he sat down to the idolatrous feast in the idol temple. First came the libation, then the grosser rites of idol-worship, then the drunken orgie, lastly those vile excesses of which it was a shame even to speak. The Bishop of Pergämun, with the faithful of his flock, was personally clear

of these abominations ; but it seems that he did not put them down with a strong hand, as one who had the oversight of the Church of God should certainly have done. Meanwhile the other faithful Pergamenes too readily condoned the laxity of their friends and acquaintances ; and continued, either without remonstrance, or with remonstrances far too feeble and half-hearted (like that of Eli with his abandoned sons, 1 Sam. ii. 23-25), to associate with them and to call them brethren. We sin as they did (1) if we indulge the thought that whatever *we* think right is right for us, and may therefore be done by us without sin ; (2) if we allow sin in ourselves, and make terms with it, instead of at once casting out the unclean thing ; (3) if we countenance sin in others. Eli was judged for the iniquity which he *knew* and did not prevent, being in the place of authority (1 Sam. iii. 13). Where we cannot prevent evil, still we may, and we should, bear witness against it. This we may do by words or by deeds, sometimes even by silence. Our witness should be faithful, loving, wise.

III. **Evil punished**, Rev. ii. 12, 16 (Heb. iv. 12, 13 ; xii. 29.) To Pergamum, as to Ephesus, is addressed an exhortation to repentance, with a threat added, "or else I will come," &c. In both cases the coming is to be understood in the same way, as a coming in judgment ; but whereas the appropriate punishment of a church grown cold was that church's extinction (as a visible, organized community), the punishment of a church which tolerated evil in her midst was to witness, and to some extent to share, the retribution inflicted upon those who did the evil. For although our Lord says, "I will fight against *them*," not "against *thee*," yet, as Archbishop Trench observes, "When God has a controversy with a church or with a people, the *tribulation* reaches all, however the judgment may be only for his foes. The gold and the dross are cast alike into the furnace, the dross



to be consumed in it, the gold to come out from it purer than before." Compare ch. xviii. 4, where God's people are warned to come out from Babylon (no doubt anti-Christian Rome), on pain of "receiving of her plagues," *i.e.*, being involved in her *temporal* judgments. From her final condemnation all His people, wherever found, are of course secure. "With the sword," &c., see Heb. iv. 12, 13. But here it may not mean alone or chiefly the *written* word, but rather Christ's word of power and judgment; that word by which "He spake and it was done," by which the Divine energy that dwells in Him takes effect; that word which is unerring, all-penetrating, sharp, mighty, sure (see Jer. xxiii. 29). This word of Christ fights for us, if we are His friends; against us, if we are His foes. Moreover, it fights against everything within us which is at enmity with Him. He will not suffer us to keep our sins; and if we try to keep them, if we hold them to our hearts, if we tolerate them even, we must feel the sharp touches of His sword. This is not because He is our enemy, but because He is our best friend. This sword of His, which by discipline and trial, by sorrow even and by pain, cuts us asunder from our cherished sins, is in the hand of love. It is our strength and comfort to know that He is fighting *for us* against the evil that is in us, and that therefore in the end it shall be utterly cast down and destroyed. But *we* must be found on His side, fighting for Him, and against our sins; for if we take the part of our sins we shall not escape that judgment which "must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter iv. 17), and chastise the sins of His own people.

IV. The hidden manna and the white stone, Rev. ii. 17 (St John vi. 49-51, 58; Ps. xxv. 14). The promises have been often likened to stars; and thus this promise may be fitly compared to one of those double stars of which astronomers tell us, in



which the two bodies, differing from each other in glory, and yet so closely joined together, circle each round the other in mysterious harmony. This is a double promise, yet the two are bound together into one by an underlying unity of thought. The manna is "hidden ;" the name on the white stone "no man knoweth save He that receiveth it." Here is evidently in both cases that "secret of the Lord" which is with them that fear Him. Here are those "precious things of heaven," blessings "of the deep that lieth under," "chief things of the ancient mountains and precious things of the lasting hills," which Christ keeps hidden for those who trust Him wholly and follow Him fully, "who dwell alone with Him in unspeakable communion, willing to lack what others own, and to be unlike all, so that they are only like Him." Such a promise would have special significance for the faithful of Pergămum. For Æsculapius, the tutelary divinity of their city, was believed to tell his secrets to his devout and earnest worshippers. Many thousands, including even kings and conquerors, came to sleep in the porticoes of his splendid temple—outside the city wall of Pergămum—believing that he would open the ears closed with slumber, and in a dream or vision impart to them the secrets of health and healing. To those who renounced all efforts to pry into these *false* secrets Christ promised the *true* ; as likewise to those who kept themselves from guilty participation in heathen festivals, He promised the hidden manna ; and according to one interpretation the token, or *tessera*, which would admit them to the heavenly banquet, with their names written—not upon the snowy parchment for which their town was famous, but in characters more enduring, upon a white stone. Allusion may also be intended to the amulets and charms which the votaries of Æsculapius were particularly fond of wearing, and which consisted of stones or pebbles inscribed with

mystic characters. But let us separate, for the present, the two stars of promise, and try to catch a ray of light from each.

(1.) Something of what may be learned from the manna has been anticipated. Ch. V., section IV. But the account of the giving of the manna (Ex. xvi. 12-36) should now be carefully studied. Amongst the special points of resemblance may be mentioned its heavenly origin (John iii. 13). Its unknown, mysterious nature (Deut. viii. 3; Matt. xi. 27). Its sweetness (Cant. ii. 3; 1 Peter ii. 7). Its purity (Heb. vii. 26). Its abundant sufficiency for all—yet the necessity of each one gathering and appropriating it day by day (1 John ii. 2; John vi. 33 and 53).

The expression "*hidden manna*" suggests an allusion to the manna laid up in the ark for a memorial before the Lord (Ex. xvi. 33). *This* manna was to be preserved for ever, whereas the rest could not be kept at all, and ceased with the wilderness journeyings. Thus we infer, that although this promise certainly finds an anticipative fulfilment here, whenever we feed on Christ in our hearts by faith, there shall be a farther and much more complete fulfilment hereafter, when we enjoy His presence, and hold communion with Him, in ways now undreamed of and hidden from us.

(2.) There has been much difference of opinion as to the exact significance of this "white stone";—whether the intended allusion is to charms and amulets; to *tesserae* or tablets (tickets as we should say) of admission to festivals; to tokens of love and fidelity exchanged between friends, like our "broken gold"; or to white stones cast into an urn for the acquittal of an accused person, as we still in certain cases use "balls" of black or white. Not one of these need be absolutely excluded except the last, which is clearly inadmissible, because justification, or acquittal, stands at the beginning (not at the end) of the Christian course, and is the preparation for

the fight, and not the reward of the conqueror. The figure may be taken, in a broad and general way, from the ancient practice of writing things of many different kinds on small stones. Archbishop Trench inclines to seek for the white stone in the mysterious Urim and Thummim of the Jewish High Priest (Ex. xxviii. 30 ; Lev. viii. 8), which he supposes to have been a diamond. Taken thus, it would signify some new and wonderful development of the priestly dignity and the priestly gifts bestowed on the children of God (ch. i. 6). To this it may be objected that the Urim and the Thummim were only worn by the *High Priest*, to whose office our Lord Himself, and *none other*, succeeds.

“ On His breast  
The Urim and the Thummim, fed with fire  
From the full Godhead, flashes with the unrest  
Of human, pitiful heart beats.”

But although in order to understand the full meaning of the white stone we may have to wait until we receive it, there are some things about it which are told us plainly here. It is a *gift* (see Prov. xvii. 8, “prospereth” might be translated “shineth”). It is a *beautiful* gift. White is a word of constant recurrence in the book we are studying (chs. i. 14 ; iii. 4, 5, 18 ; iv. 4 ; vi. 11, &c.). It is “not the mere absence of other colour, not the dull ‘*albus*,’ but the bright ‘*candidus*,’ glistening white.” It signifies innocence, purity, victory, joy.—A *precious* gift, for the white stone is doubtless a precious stone, a jewel—one of the most beautiful, most durable, and most costly of earthly things, and therefore often used in scripture as a type.—A *special* gift. This quality of specialness greatly enhances the value even of human gifts ; a trifle procured with special thought for us, being far more prized than a costly largess shared with others. We think instinctively of our Lord’s parting gift to His own (St John xiv. 27), as uniting all these qualities,

There are those who even here and now enjoy this peace in rich measure ; even in the midst of suffering and conflict their peace is as a river—

“Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin.”

And, hereafter, standing on the sea of glass, they shall find the peace of faith merge in the peace of fruition, as the twilight merges into the perfect day. With the gift is a communication—something is written upon the stone. This secret communication concerns the receiver, and him alone. We cannot expect God to reveal to us His secrets about others (St John xxi. 21, 22.) We must trust Him with these ; but if we walk closely with Him He will reveal to us much for ourselves. The name on the stone is a secret name, and it is also a new name. Evidently it is the receiver's own name, not Christ's. *Christ's* new name is spoken of, ch. iii. 12, and also said to be a secret (ch. xix. 12). Indeed “new,” like “white,” is one of the key notes of this book, of which the grand theme is the new heavens and the new earth. The bestowal of a new name is a token of favour (see Gen. xvii. 5 ; xxxii. 28 ; xlii. 45 ; Dan. i. 7). It marks also the bestowal of a new *position*, as in the case of Joseph and of Daniel. It also denotes *adoption* ; the child taken new into the family receives a new name. Still more is it the sign of a new *character* ; and this is well illustrated by the case of *Daniel* and his companions, when the object (happily frustrated) was to transform them from Jewish patriots into Chaldean courtiers. The transformation of “the worm Jacob” into Israel, the “prince with God,” is another case in point ; also the change of the impetuous, unstable, Simon Bar-jona into Peter or Cephas, a stone worthy of an honoured place in the foundation of the wall of the New Jerusalem. So Christ, who knows us better than we know ourselves, sees in each one of us the germs of that new character



which His grace will work out and perfect. Like Michael Angelo, who, looking on a shapeless block of marble, said, "I see here a possible statue," Christ sees in each that glorious thing which He purposes to make of him or her. His ideal for each is different. No two new characters, therefore no two "new names," shall be the same ; but each, as He means it to be, as it ought to be, and as it shall be, exists already perfect in His mind, like the pattern which Moses saw on the mount. That this divine thought shall be fully realised, this new character completely transferred to us, or rather worked out in us, is surely a part of the promise here. Only a part ; there must be more than we can see, since this new name "no man knoweth save he that receiveth it." If we desire to know, let us be found amongst those who overcome. But even here, "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him ;" with His *friends* (St John xv. 15), with those who walk closely with Him, in obedience and communion. And hereafter they shall see eye to eye, and know even as they are known.

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA (Rev. ii. 18-29).

I. The last works more than the first (Rev. ii. 18, 19 ; Acts xvi. 14, 15, 40 ; 1 Thess. iv. 1). The order of these epistles follows in the main that of the great Roman road by which the messenger who bore them would naturally travel. Thyatira lay a little to the left of this road, between Pergamos and Sardis. It was at that time a thriving commercial town, possessed of considerable wealth (as was shewn by the booty the Romans obtained when they conquered it), but far from rivalling Ephesus or Pergamum in fame or importance. Its history is comparatively obscure ; but it owed its name to Seleucus Nicator, who called it after his daughter,

and settled in it a Macedonian colony. Once, and once only, is it mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, Acts xvi. 14. There we find, very naturally, a woman of Thyatira residing in a chief city of the mother country (ver. 12). Lydia was "a seller of purple;" and, as early as the days of Homer, the district in which Thyatira is situated was celebrated for the purple dyes manufactured by its women. Although the inscriptions on the ruins of the ancient Thyatira are not numerous, it is remarkable that no less than three of those which have been deciphered refer to the guild of dyers belonging to the city. No doubt this trade in the beautiful and costly colours, so prized by the ancients, brought much wealth to Thyatira. Moreover, we may reasonably conclude that when Lydia, the seller of purple, returned, as she was almost sure to do, to her native town, she brought back with her some better things than silver or gold. In the absence of all information about the introduction of the gospel into Thyatira, it is natural to assume that either Lydia herself, or some members of her household, who believed and were baptized with her, brought the first seeds of truth to the Asiatic town; while disciples of St Paul or St John, probably from Ephesus, may have afterwards carried on the good work. To this church is addressed the longest of the seven epistles, and in some respects the most difficult also; though its difficulties lie mainly in our ignorance of the particular circumstances of the Church, and would probably be lessened, if not removed, by larger information. In her general characteristics, Thyatira resembles Pergamum, and contrasts strongly with Ephesus. To her our Lord styles Himself "the Son of God," and this character of power and dignity He maintains throughout, with special allusion to Psalm ii. The eyes of flame and the feet of burnished metal (see Ch. II. Section I.) may bear

a reference, not only to the popular representation of the sun-god Apollo, the tutelary deity of Thyatira, but to the path of Christ's judgments, and to that searching of the reins and hearts (ver. 23), which only He who looks us through and through can adequately perform. He finds much to praise here. *I know thy works and charity*—or rather, *love*; since we have well-nigh spoiled the word 'charity' for higher uses by applying it to the fruit rather than the root, to the things which are (or ought to be) done out of love, rather than to the love that inspires them. Hence it follows, by a natural downward step, that we often speak of charity as of something cold or perfunctory, the very opposite of the grace so magnificently described in 1 Cor. xiii. The love here intended is no doubt first towards God, then towards men. We may follow Dean Alford's Greek text, and the Revised Version, in taking next "*and thy faith*;" for while there must be some faith in God before there can be any love to Him, yet love in its turn feeds faith; the more we love, the more we will trust. Both faith and love feed and sustain the "*service*," which springs from them. The word is ministry, *diakonia*; it is applied here to all those works of faith and love in which this Church was eminent, and which our Lord recognizes and praises. (See Heb. vi. 10.) Yet the Church of Thyatira was not so absorbed in outward activities as to leave uncultivated the passive side of the Christian character. Prompt and zealous in action, she was ready also to wait and to suffer. Her patience is praised by our Lord: "*the brave patience*," so the word implies, "*with which the Christian contends against the various hindrances, persecutions, and temptations which befall him in his conflict with the inner and outer world.*" But our Lord reserves for the last the most emphatic and characteristic commendation of all. In this faithful Church the light did not



grow dim with years and changes ; with trials, temptations, and the seductions of the world ; or even with the passing away of their first teachers, the immediate disciples of St Paul or St John. Thyatira did not, like Ephesus, lose her first love ; her goodness was not like the early dew (Hosea vi. 4), but rather like the morning light, which grows more and more until the perfect day. The lesson is an important one. Every period of our Christian, as well as our natural life, has its appropriate grace and beauty. The "first works," the early days of faith and love, have theirs, which is characteristic and peculiar to themselves. It cannot continue *just the same*, but it may either fade into comparative dimness and coldness ; or, gaining in depth and intensity far more than it loses in freshness and fervour, it may grow into the all-pervading principle and the all-inspiring passion of a holy life. There is a period in the course of every young Christian when either of these two roads opens out before him. The world around us, our great adversary, and our own evil nature, tempt to the slackening of faith and love, which is the easier way ; but the grace of Christ is sufficient for us. In His strength let us resolve that our "last" shall be "more," and not less than our first ; that so our walk here may be holy, happy, and useful, and an entrance may be ministered unto us "abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

II. "That woman Jezebel," Rev. ii. 20-23 (Prov. v. 3, 4 ; xxxi. 26, 30).

What our Lord has against this Church ("a few things" is not in the original) resembles His complaint of Perg mum, but it is more emphatic, definite, and full. Perg mum only "had there," the false teachers, Thyatira distinctly *suffered* them. Whilst those "that held the doctrines of Balaam" troubled Perg mum, "that woman Jezebel" *herself* taught



and seduced in Thyatira ; and this greater definiteness appears also in the judgments with which both are threatened. That it should increase our difficulty in understanding the passage is only natural, and is indeed a real evidence of its genuineness. We have but to consider how hard it is to understand even an ordinary letter, written in our time, without some acquaintance with the circumstances of the person addressed ; how then can we expect that any *real* letter, addressed to *real* persons eighteen hundred years ago and under almost unknown conditions, should not contain statements and allusions very perplexing to us ? About this letter we ask—(1.) Was “Jezebel” an actual woman, or a type or symbol ? (2.) Who were meant by the partners of her guilt, ver. 22, and her “children,” ver. 23 ? (3.) What was to be her punishment and theirs ? (1.) A careful study of the position and character of the Old Testament Jezebel is a necessary preliminary to this inquiry. See 1 Kings xvi. 31 ; xviii. 4 ; xix. 1, 2 ; xxi. ; 2 Kings ix. 22 to end. We find that Jezebel was the tempter of Israel to the two great and closely allied sins of idolatry and fornication. These, as we have already noticed, were the sins of the followers of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes ; and we should expect to find the same in the neighbouring communities, both on account of their constant intercourse, and of the similar character of their circumstances and temptations. Near neighbours usually suffer from the same diseases ; either because they infect one another, or because all are subject to the same influences. As the true Church is often spoken of under the symbol of a woman—a chaste virgin or a bride—so, under the figure of an abandoned woman of evil life, a false church, or a mischievous sect, may well be intended. That such a church is prefigured by the sublimely awful picture of chapter xvii. most of us are

persuaded. Yet there is a *definiteness* in the mention of "that woman Jezebel" which looks as if this interpretation were scarcely adequate here. Some copies add to the Greek a significant pronoun, which makes the words read, "thy wife Jezebel." Hence a conjecture has arisen that the wife of the bishop was intended. To this we can only say, that although, in the absence of evidence on the subject, we cannot pronounce it absolutely impossible, it is in the highest degree improbable, especially as the personal piety of the bishop himself is expressly vindicated by our Lord, ver. 24. We must remember, however, that in those days miraculous gifts were common, and were exercised by women as well as by men (Joel ii. 28, 29; Acts ii. 17, 18; xxi. 9). So also were their counterfeits. It is not alone in sacred history that we read of "damsels with a spirit of divination" (Acts xvi. 16). What classical writers tell us of Pythonesses and Sibyls, opens before us mysterious vistas of speculation, into which we cannot enter here. But it may be worth while to mention that there was at this time, just outside the wall of Thyatira, a temple dedicated to a Sibyl called Sambethe—an oriental object of idolatry, said to have been introduced by the Jews of the Dispersion. Such a mixture of debased Jewish and heathen worship might seem to suit the description here; and, through the Jews, the Christians might have been drawn into abetting it. But we must be content, after all, to leave the matter in the uncertainty which is only natural here. (2.) This uncertainty must extend to the interpretation of the accomplices and the children of Jezebel. If we take these terms figuratively, we may gather from them that the guilt of those in error differs in degree; some, choosing a false system for themselves, deliberately turn away from the light, and towards the darkness; others, who may be called the "children," are brought up in it without choice

of their own, though eventually they willingly identify themselves with it. (3.) The more or less literal interpretation of the judgments denounced depends upon the view we take of what has gone before. Notice, that these judgments are three-fold, casting into a bed (*i.e.*, of pain and languishing), great tribulation, and death. However we may understand them, we cannot doubt that they were awful and terrible ; and we may gather from them some solemn lessons. (1.) That delay in the punishment of sinners which they often interpret as an encouragement to continue in sin (Eccles. viii. 11 ; 2 Peter iii. 3, 4), they owe in reality to the mercy and long-suffering of God, who would fain lead them to repentance, ver. 21 (Rom. ii. 4-6). It is a fearful thing to trifle with His mercy, and to despise His long-suffering. (2.) Ver. 23. Christ is the Searcher of hearts, who sees us through and through, and knows us better than we know ourselves (Heb. iv. 13). (3.) Christ will give *unto every one of us* according to our works. Because it is "a wholesome doctrine, very full of comfort," that we are justified by faith, and not by our works, we must not forget that we shall be judged according to our works (Matt. xvi. 27 ; Rom. ii. 6 ; 2 Cor. v. 10). Those who belong to Christ shall not be brought to His bar as criminals (Rom. viii. 1), but they shall be reckoned with as servants, who have been more or less faithful with that which was committed to them, (Matt. xxv. 19 ; Luke xix. 15), who have sown sparingly or sown abundantly, (2 Cor. ix. 6). (4.) Lastly, this passage suggests for our consideration the influence of women for good or for evil. We have already noticed the part probably borne by Lydia in the founding of this church. It has been observed that just the same graces which St Paul praises in the Philippian Christians, abounded in those of Thyatira (see Phil. iv. 10-18), as if the Philippian convert, who first



brought to them the word of Christ, had impressed her own character upon them. It may be instructive to contrast what we know of Lydia's faith and obedience, and her quiet womanly ministrations (Acts xvi. 14, 15, 40), with what we infer from the passage before us about that other woman of Thyatira (real or symbolical), who was so powerful for evil. It is told of Jezebel that she used to "teach" and to "seduce," *i.e.*, to persuade by argument or eloquence, and to lead by personal influence. In both these ways, and perhaps especially the latter, God often gives large power to women; let them see that they use it according to His will and in His work, that so they may serve their generation, and, having fallen asleep, may leave behind them an honoured name and a fragrant memory, like Lydia, and not like "that woman Jezebel."

III. **Keeping what we have**, Rev. ii. 24, 25 (Acts xv. 28, 29; Jude 20, 21, 24). Here the personal character of the "angel" is vindicated; and he, with the rest of the faithful in Thyatira, who "have not" this teaching (that is, who not only hold it not, but are free from contact with it,) receives a charge which is also an encouragement. The expression "depths of Satan" is remarkable. We know that the early heretics used to boast of their knowledge of the deep things of God; Gnostic comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge (compare the use at present of the word agnostic, "*a*" meaning not). These Gnostic teachers were fond of talking of "the depths," and saying that those who knew them, as they did, were exonerated from the observance of duties and commands which might be useful to, and even binding upon, their simpler brethren. To themselves,—the spiritual men, the men who knew the deep things of God—all things were pure, all things clean; they might even indulge in the grossest sins



of the flesh, and these would leave no stain upon their higher nature. Christ takes up this terrible travesty of truth to brand it with indignant reprobation; the "depths" which upon their lips were "depths of God," became upon His, what they truly were, "depths of Satan." That ignorance of evil, with which doubtless they reproached the simple believers, was turned to the praise of these, and to their own confusion. We learn from this that there is an ignorance which is good, and a knowledge which is evil. This last was the temptation offered to our first parents (Gen. iii. 5), and ever since the great tempter has not ceased to entice our fallen nature with it. But evil knowledge does not necessarily mean knowledge of *the existence* of evil; this in a measure *must* come to us, living as we do in an evil world; and sometimes it comes to us, in acutely painful forms, through our very efforts to grapple with, and to lessen, the sin and sorrow around us. What we learn of evil in fighting evil will, by the grace of God, never do us harm. The really evil knowledge is what we learn of evil out of secret sympathy with it; out of the pride that ventures in its own strength upon forbidden ground; out of the morbid curiosity which plays with that which is hidden, or forbidden. Let Phil. iv. 8 be the rule of all our thinking, and then we shall be free from these snares. We cannot mistake the reference which follows to Acts xv. 28, 29; as the word "depths" was our key to the meaning of the former phrase, so the word "burden" is our key to the meaning of this. Just those commands which the false teachers set at nought formed the "burden" laid on the Gentile Church in the Apostolic letter, which was the great charter of her liberty. So here our Lord, reaffirming this charter by the mouth of one of the Apostles who had taken part in the Council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 6), asserts at once the obligations of His Church

and her freedom. His "yoke" and His "burden" are laid upon her, and must be held fast till He come; but that yoke is easy and that burden is light. What He required of her—and still requires of us—is not acuteness of intellect, but faithfulness of heart. We need not "exercise ourselves in matters too high for us," need not understand mysteries, need not go in search of curious speculations; enough if we keep the faith, and having received Christ, abide in Him, and grow up unto Him. Nor, if such speculations come to us, need we be disturbed or alarmed. Ver. 25 gives the rule by which we should abide. All new thought which would rob us of "that which we have already" must be rejected, and the truths which we have received, and by which we live, held fast "till He come." All new thought which professes to be only illustrative and explanatory, strengthening and rendering more intelligent our hold upon "that which we have already," should be examined with care, compared diligently with Scripture, and the aid of the Holy Spirit sought earnestly to ascertain whether it should be accepted, or rejected.

**IV. The promise of dominion and the morning star,** Rev. ii. 26-29. (Ps. ii. 7-9; Rev. xix. 11-16; Rom. viii. 17; Rev. xxii. 16; Cant. ii. 16). We have here, as in the case of Pergamos, a binary star of promise. The two parts must be considered separately. (1.) The promise of dominion. Christ, who describes Himself to this church as the Divine Son, here carries out the reference to Psalm ii. Moreover He engages here that the conqueror shall share His own foretold and promised "power over the nations." This power is not *might* alone, but *right*, authority. (Revised Version.) In the present state of things there is often might without right, and sometimes right without the might necessary to enforce it; but when this promise finds its fulfil-

ment might shall be right, and right shall be might. We observe that "break," in Psalm ii. 9, becomes "rule" in the verse before us. The Hebrew words for "thou shalt break" and "thou shalt rule" (or shepherd) differ only in their vowels, and the Septuagint adopted the milder reading, "Thou shalt rule." Upon this reading our Lord here sets His seal, not necessarily as the original intention of the Psalmist, but as signifying and emphasizing a glorious truth. Terrible as may be the sceptre of iron, dashing into fragments with resistless power all that opposes it, it is in the hand of the Most Merciful, as well as of the Most Righteous One. Whilst dealing destruction to all who absolutely refuse its sway, it will be, for the whole creation, now groaning and travailing in pain, the insignia of a rule full of blessing and peace, because full of righteousness. The Greek word used here for *rule* is *poimanei*, the same which, in John xxi. 16, is translated "*Feed my sheep.*" We are thus led to see the true glory and beauty of this promise, which at first sight may seem less attractive than others to the lowly and loving heart. Do we not sometimes look at the world around us with a passion of pain, a bitterness of sorrow, which all our faith and hope can scarce avail to still; when we see "the oppressions that are done under the sun, and the tears of such as are oppressed and have no comforter, and on the side of their oppressors there is power and they have no comforter"? This *world-pain* (*welt-schmerz*), with the perplexities about the government of God which it awakens in the heart, is as old as the days of Asaph, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk (Ps. lxxiii.; Jer. xii. 1; Hab. i. 12-14). But the questions are answered, the pain is stilled, and the heart finds peace, in the promise and prospect of the universal rule of the Righteous One, when the sceptre that sways the world's destinies shall rest in the Hand that was pierced



for the world's sin, Ps. lxxii. ; Isa. xxxii. ; Rev. xix. 11-16. This last passage should be studied in connection with the one before us, as it shows us the fulfilment of the promise. We see Christ taking unto Him His great power, smiting, ruling, reigning in righteousness. Christ is the Conqueror, the King ; and His people, associated with Him, are kings and conquerors too (ver. 14). Note, that while *His* vesture is "dipped in blood," theirs are "white and clean." He trod the winepress alone, fought and suffered for us. There is no blood of *our own* on our robes ; since His was shed to take away our sins, and to make ourselves and our garments white. There is no blood of *others* there ; perhaps because the work of vengeance (most necessary though most awful) will be His alone ; though we shall have a part in the righteous and peaceful rule that will follow it, and last for ever. It is a glorious promise and a blessed one, that upon this poor, suffering, storm-tossed earth Christ shall make an end of transgression, and bring in everlasting righteousness ; and that *we*, who have mourned over its sorrows, and struggled, however feebly, against its sins, shall bear part with Him in the work of its regeneration (Matt. xix. 28 ; 1 Cor. vi. 2). (2.) Ver. 28. Some suppose that the "morning star" here is a title of Christ Himself. In this case the idea would be that Christ not only gives His own glory and dominion to the conqueror, but gives *Himself* ; not alone what He *has*, but what He *is* (compare chap. xxii. 16). There is possibly an allusion here to the sun-god Apollo. Christ is the true sun ; for stars are suns, and suns are stars. All the light, and heat, and life the world has comes from Him. The future and the hope of the world are with Him. His light shall not fade away into darkness, it shall grow and grow unto the perfect day. But, as Christ is the Speaker here, it is questioned by others whether the words



“the morning star” can thus be taken as a designation of Himself. They may, therefore, be a figure of the *Coming day*, and the idea may be that Christ will give an “earnest of the sovereignty of light over darkness, when the children of the day would be manifest and shine as the stars for ever and ever” (Bishop Carpenter).

What He is for the world, rising upon its darkness, that He is for each one of us rising in our hearts (2 Pet. i. 19). It is not yet full day with us ; twilight lingers around and shadows within us. But the morning star is ours ; and His arising is the token and the promise of the perfect day which is at hand. The star that glimmers through our darkness here will flood with its full glory, as the sun of Righteousness, the streets of that New Jerusalem which will need, and have, no other light (chap. xxi. 23).

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF SARDIS (Rev. iii. 1-6).

I. **A name to live**, Rev. iii. 1 (Prov. xxii. 1 ; Isa. i. 22 ; 1 Sam xvi. 7, last clause). We know a good deal about the ancient city of Sardis. Its history is interwoven with that of the kingdom of Lydia, of which it was the capital. The story of Croesus, the last king of Lydia, is familiar to most of us, and has been often used to point a moral. Under him, Sardis lost her independence, and never afterwards recovered it. After the battle of Magnesia, the city passed into the hands of the Romans, retaining however its wealth and prosperity. A terrible earthquake destroyed nearly all its public buildings in the days of Tiberius ; but they were restored, and with increased magnificence, by order of the Emperor. But of the *Church* of Sardis, on the other hand we know nothing. Scripture is silent, nor does Church history fill in the blank. Even those

local allusions which we have been able to trace out in the other epistles, seem to be singularly absent. Side lights fail us here. Like a photograph without background and without accessories, yet all the more distinct and striking, this one picture of the Church of Sardis stands out before us, traced in unerring lines by the finger of light. Perhaps its lesson of warning is all the more impressive. We notice that to this Church, which needed so terribly the quickening influences of the Spirit, Christ describes Himself as He who hath the seven Spirits—or the perfect Spirit—of God, and therefore can give to all who ask. To Ephesus He reveals Himself as “holding” the stars “in his right hand;” to Sardis merely as “having” them. It is probable from what follows that the angel of the Church of Sardis did not realise that Christ was holding him, was not consciously in the hand of Christ; yet Christ “had” him still, and he would one day feel that hand, either for restoration or for judgment.

It would seem at the first glance as if this church was specially favoured. She had three great apparent advantages; two negative and one positive. (1.) No persecution (contrast ch. ii. 9, 10, 13). There is no allusion here either to Jewish or to Pagan hostility. We can imagine the Christians of Smyrna and Pergamos envying their brethren in Sardis.—“Happy people, who can sit under their own vines and fig trees, and worship Christ in peace and safety.” But *were* they indeed so happy? Persecution entails cruel suffering; yet there are worse things than the suffering which proves and purifies. The great fire of London was accounted a great calamity; but the plague has never appeared in London from that day to this. (2.) No heresy. Sardis seems to have been as free from troubles within as from “fightings without.” No Nicolaitanes or Balaamites disturbed her quiet; nor did any false

teacher, like the Thyatiran Jezebel, teach and seduce in her midst. For aught that appears to the contrary, she was as sound in the faith as Ephesus. But orthodoxy may, and often does, exist without spiritual life. Indifference does not provoke persecution ; nor does it, as a general rule, engender heresy. People who do not think at all cannot well think amiss : just as those who do nothing cannot well make mistakes ;—although, as it has been truly said, that it is only because their whole lives are one great mistake. Thus the barren, lifeless orthodoxy which springs from a careless indifference, may indicate a state far more hopeless than the conflict of truth and error. (3.) But Sardis had one positive and very real advantage—a good name (see Prov. xxii. 1 ; Eccles. vii. 1). It is undeniable that to have a good and honourable name—to be “of honest report” (Acts vi. 3), “well reported of for good works” (1 Tim. v. 10)—is a most desirable thing. If our lamps signify our profession, it is our duty to keep them bright and burnished, so that the light within may shine forth for the encouragement and guidance of others (Matt. v. 16). Those who witness for Christ and work for Him should desire to have “a good report even of them which are without,” although, if called upon to choose between the praise of men and the praise of God, their choice should not be doubtful. Censure and obloquy *must* sometimes be incurred for conscience sake, but they should never be braved recklessly, out of mere indifference or wantonness. A good repute in the Church of God, the good opinion of good men, is much more to be valued than the esteem of the world. How Sardis retained this we are not told ; but we notice a difference in this respect between her and the sister Church of Laodicea. Laodicea thought very well of herself (ver. 17), but it is never said that others shared the opinion. Sardis seems to have imposed upon others, as also doubtless on herself. Probably



amongst the “ things that remained ” in her (ver. 2) were those outward acts of ministration and beneficence, which, whether or not they are done “ to be seen of men,” yet from their very nature must be so seen. These are the most fruitful in *present* praise and recompense, the easiest to keep up, and usually the last which the backslider abandons in his mournful course of gradual declension. It well may be that wealthy, peaceful, comfortable Sardis, made handsome contributions to the collections for poor saints in less favoured places. This was good so far ; but whilst men blessed the outstretched hand for the gift that was in it, He who seeth in secret discerned and mourned the failure of that love which alone could have made the gift precious in His eyes. Thus the “ name to live ” ceased to be a blessing ; nay, it became a curse. For the worst and easiest form of deception is self-deception ; and we are so readily influenced by others, so sensitive to their opinion, so apt to listen to their voices (especially when these confirm our own wishes), that self-approval is fostered, fatally and almost irresistibly, by the approval of our fellow-men. It is hard indeed, amidst a chorus of applauding voices, to listen for the one voice, “ still and small,” which speaks to us, it may be in tones altogether different. Yet a day must come when all other voices shall die away, and only this one be heard. Each of us who has “ a name to live,” who accepts himself, and is accepted by others, as a follower of Christ, should make the application in his own heart.

II. **The duty of Watchfulness**, Rev. iii. 2, 3 (Mark xiii. 33-37 ; Matt. xxvi. 40, 41). The exhortation to watchfulness is often repeated in the New Testament. It is the first practical duty of the soldier and servant of Christ ; for unless this attitude of mind be duly maintained, no other duty can be rightly performed ; all the rest depend upon this. There are three kinds of watching enjoined :—



watching *for* (the coming of Christ, Luke xii. 37), watching *unto* (prayer and diligence in duty, Eph. vi. 18), and watching *against* (sloth and sin, 1 Thess. v. 6). So the soldier on guard watches for his captain's word of command, and for the welcome signal which will relieve him from his post ; watches unto the right performance of his duty, and the care of his weapons and armour ; watches against the foes who may assail him. The command, "Be watchful," carries a somewhat different meaning, according as it is addressed to those who are watching already, or to those who are careless, slumbering and sleeping. Here it bears the stronger interpretation—Wake ! Rouse up ! Become watchful ! See Eph. v. 14. But how can the dead, who have no power, and even no consciousness, be called upon to awake and to watch ? Setting aside the possible answer that this "dead" Church was yet not utterly and absolutely dead—that there still lingered in her some sparks and relics of life, which might be fanned into a flame—it is true that Christ speaks thus to those who are really dead in trespasses and sins, commanding them to awake and to arise. He does this, because the word He speaks is a word of life and power, which brings with it the strength to obey it. The sublime vision of Ezek. xxxvii. 1-10 illustrates this. His Spirit accompanies His Word ; as this dead Church is reminded (ver. 1) He has the perfect Spirit of God to give to all who ask Him. Those "things," *i.e.*, good things, which remain, Sardis is told to strengthen, for even they are ready to die. When the living impulse dies away, the good works that sprang from it are like cut flowers, severed from the source of life. They may retain their freshness for a while—some longer and some shorter than others, but they gradually fade away and wither. Still it is remarkable that the Church is told to "strengthen" these things—not to abandon them as worthless, and to begin quite new

ones. When first we come to recognise with sorrow our past backsliding and deadness, it is sometimes our impulse to allow the habits we had formed in happier days, and still keep up perhaps half mechanically, to drop away from us ; either in a kind of despair, or because we esteem ourselves unworthy any longer to work for Christ—it may be even to draw near to His table. But this is not the process Christ enjoins upon the repentant backslider. The things, which in themselves are right and good, are to be strengthened, not abandoned. We are to come back to Him with weeping and with mourning, and to entreat Him to pour out upon us His divine Spirit, that so our works may be rendered acceptable, and found “perfect” before Him. The force of “perfect” here is *complete*. The works of Sardis were not perfect, *i.e.*, they were “not up to the mark and measure of being acceptable before Him,” because they were not the offspring of a living faith and love. Christ does not say to Sardis, remember *what* thou hast received and heard, but “*how*,” because she does not seem to have departed at all from the form of sound words originally delivered to her. Her faith was correct, but cold ; she had lost not the intellectual perception of truth, but its living and life-giving influences. She had to return to her first love, not to her first creed. She was to *remember* things known before, not to learn new things. We have only the old truths—the old, yet ever new, Gospel of Christ—to fall back upon ;—there is no other word of life, no other way of salvation. These old truths Sardis must “keep,” or “hold fast”—“as an abiding habit.” She must also repent, *i.e.*, change her mind and heart, and turn back again to the Lord <sup>whom</sup> she had forsaken. “If therefore,” &c. The sad condition of this Church, which seemed to hover on the borderland between aggravated backsliding and actual

apostasy, drew from our Lord solemn words of warning. He could not say to her, Heb. vi. 9. He warned her solemnly of the fate which would overtake her if found unrepentant at His coming: no doubt His coming in judgment, as ch. ii. 5, 6. And this coming would be sudden and unexpected, like that of a thief—*not* a robber or bandit, the words are carefully distinguished in the Greek—but a thief who steals into the house unexpectedly in the darkness and silence of the night. The ancient Greek proverb, “The avenging gods are shod with wool,” teaches the same truth—that upon unrepentant sinners judgment at last comes suddenly (see ch. ii. 5, 21-23, and Luke xvii. 26-30). We have no information as to whether the Church of Sardis profited by this solemn warning. The silence of early Church history about her further history is only broken by the mention of one honourable name. Melito, a Bishop of Sardis in the second century, was the author of an apology for the Christian Religion, and of several other works, none of which, however, have come down to us. There was a council held at Sardis A.D. 347, but it was “an obscure and local synod,” not recognised by the Church at large. In the fifteenth century the city was wholly desolated by the Tartars, and has never since been rebuilt. Its site at the present day, now called Sart, is only marked by a mill, the owner of which is the one permanent inhabitant of the place, and a Christian.

III. **The White Raiment**, Rev. iii. 4, 5 (Zech. iii. 3, 4; Isa. lxi. 10; Phil. iii. 9; Rev. vii. 14). “*But thou hast a few names,*” &c. There were a few faithful ones still in Sardis, and of these not one was unnoticed by the discerning eye of Christ. He knows each by name (John x. 3). As in Pergamum He marked with special approval those who held fast His truth in the very seat of Satan, so here He honours with highest praise the few who



continued faithful amidst surrounding indifference. It is a helpful thought for us, that Christ is as pleased with those who continue faithful to Him amongst worldly and careless associates, as with those who witness for Him amidst persecution and suffering. Sloth and apathy are terribly infectious ; and the traveller who strives bravely to keep himself and others awake amidst the benumbing breath of Alpine snows, may be quite as heroic as he who faces death on the battle-field. We see here that there is a clean garment which the child of God wears even now, a robe which is washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. vii. 14 ; Zech. iii. 4). But Scripture and experience alike teach us that indulged sin brings a stain upon the heart and conscience, which it requires a fresh application to the cleansing blood to take away. Besides the first great washing, which is our justification, we need the constant daily cleansing from daily sin (John xiii. 10, R.V.). Those who have kept their garments undefiled (not so much from casual stains, as from pollution, filth—so the original implies), would then be those who, walking closely and faithfully with Christ, have not fallen into such grievous and deliberate sin as would break the communion between their souls and Him ; whilst for the sins that overtake them daily, they go at once to Him for pardon, so that the stains do not *rest* upon them. Or, we may take their garments generally as their Christian profession, which is a thing seen by the world, and visibly defiled by inconsistency of conduct. Those who on earth walk with Christ by faith blameless and harmless, shall walk with Him in heaven hereafter, glorious and triumphant. The garment of earth is the garment of grace, that of heaven will be the garment of glory. This latter garment is white in the positive sense, shining, lustrous (see Ch. VII., 4). Taking together then the two similar promises (vv. 3 and 4)



we note three things: (1.) The white robe, the garment of joy and glory—not only without a stain, but never to be stained again. This is the gift of Christ, who purchased it by His death and suffering; His garments being dipped in blood that ours may be dazzling and unsullied white. (2.) Thus robed, “they shall *walk*,” though it is also said they shall “rest” (ch. vi. 11), for their rest will be an active rest; not death, but fulness of life (Isa. lvii. 2). (3.) Best of all, they shall “walk with Me,”—shall be with Him for ever, serving Him, seeing His face (ch. xxii. 3, 4), following Him whithersoever He goeth (ch. xiv. 4). “For they are worthy:” Not for their own merits or deservings, but through His grace who enabled them. The robe of grace is as much His gift as the robe of glory (compare Zech. iii. 4). The grace which He has given He loves to crown. But whilst *He* praises, *they* own, in deep thankful humility, that all they have is from Him. To His, “they are worthy,” they answer with glad hallelujahs, “*Thou* art worthy,” ch. v. 9. There occurs in this book another “They are worthy,” of very different and very awful character (ch. xvi. 7). Even so, true and righteous are the judgments of God. Each in the end shall “go to his own place.” A walk by faith with Christ here leads to a walk with Him in glory hereafter; whilst cruelty, violence, unrepented sin, lead to the fulfilment of the terrible prophecy, Ezek. xxxv. 6.

IV. **The Book of Life**, Rev. iii. 5 (Rev. xx. 12; xiii. 8; xxi. 27). The leading thought, or key-note, of this epistle is the *name*. We have a name that was false and delusive,—worthy names,—names written in the Book of Life, and which shall be confessed by Christ. This promise, itself half of a double promise (like those to Pergamum and Thyatira), again divides into two parts: (1) The name recorded; (2) the name confessed, (1.) The

first question which occurs to us is—What is this Book of Life? A book is a durable, permanent, and legible record (Job xix. 23, 24). In this sense there are many books—some which God has written, and some which we write for ourselves. Memory and conscience are books to which every day we add a page. In the depths beneath our consciousness this writing goes on continually, never ceasing and never effaced. It has well been said that “there is no such thing as forgetting possible to the mind.” A thousand things, like the moss and lichen on a tombstone, may interpose themselves between the consciousness and the inscription, and thus render it illegible. But it is always there, and always liable to be brought out again by the removal of the intervening obstacles. Doubtless this awful book of memory will be amongst the books opened at the day of judgment (ch. xx. 21), and from which the Book of Life is so carefully discriminated. The books which God is said to have written are of various kinds. We hear of the Book of Nature, and the Book of Revelation, the Bible. We are told also of the book of His purposes (ch. v. 1), of the book of His remembrance (Mal. iii. 16 ; Ps. lvi. 8), and of the Book of Life. There are references throughout Scripture to the enrolling of God’s people in a book, from which blotting out means being “cut off,” or destroyed. See Ex. xxxii. 32, where we can hardly suppose Moses meant anything else, or anything more, than this. See also Ps. lxxxvii. 6, 7, “a Psalm which appears to have been sung at some enrolment of proselytes from Egypt and Babylon, from Philistia and Tyre and Ethiopia, among the citizens of Zion,” Isa. iv. 3 ; Dan. xii. 1. So it was said of the false prophets (Ezek. xiii. 9), that they should not be “written in the writing of the house of Israel,” and of those that forsake the Lord, that they should be “written in the earth” (Jer. xvii.

13). In the New Testament the image is taken up and carried forward. See Luke x. 20, where the enrolment is into the spiritual Israel, the Church of God. In the Church visible there would be unfaithful members, like those in Sardis, whose names, as in the earlier dispensation, would be blotted out. Against this penalty the few faithful ones are here insured. But we cannot fail to see a yet higher significance in the Book of Life, as the phrase is used in chs. xiii. 8 ; xx. 12, 15 ; xxi. 27, and also in Phil. iv. 3. Here the Book would seem to contain the names only of those who are "elect," or chosen unto eternal life, "called according to His purpose" (Rom. viii. 28-30). It is evident that *this* Book of God no human eye hath seen, or can see *at present*. And yet we may assume that the names of *others* are written there (Phil. iv. 3) when we see in them the things that accompany salvation. Can we have a similar confidence with regard to our own? Surely we may, when we have received "the earnest of the inheritance" (Eph. i. 13, 14), and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. v. 1-5). (2.) The first part of the promise was negative, the second is positive. The name shall not only be retained—left upon the record—but confessed (see also 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12 ; Matt. x. 32, 33). What a motive for faithfulness, what a warning against unfaithfulness! Yet, however unfaithful we may have been in the past, let us take comfort for the future. Peter denied his Lord—not once, but three times,—yet he was not only forgiven, but honoured to confess Him before men (John xxi. 15-19 with 2 Peter i. 14). Contrast *our* confessing Him before the world with His confessing us before His Father and before the angels. How infinitely grander, more sublime, the scene and the company!—He will confess the name as that of His friend. We all understand the pleasure it would give us, if in some large and

very honourable assembly (where perhaps we felt timid and afraid), the greatest personage present were to come forward and welcome us, saying, "This is *My friend*." This is just what Christ promises to do. Further, He makes Himself responsible as Advocate for each one whose name He confesses. He will make his cause His own, identify Himself with him. He will see that in the case of each His own prayer, John xvii. 22-24, is entirely and gloriously fulfilled.

### THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA (Rev. iii. 7-13).

I. **Open doors**, ch. iii. 7, 8 (John x. 9; Acts xiv. 27; 1 Cor. xvi. 9; Col. iv. 3). The city of Philadelphia was neither ancient nor royal, nor specially celebrated for greatness of any kind, even for wealth or magnificence. It was, at the Apostolic period, about two centuries old, having been founded by the second king of Pergamos, Attalus Philadelphus, who gave it his own name—a very happy one, since it signifies "brotherly love." No halo of especial glory surrounds the Church which dwelt in it. Like Smyrna, Pergamum, and Sardis, Philadelphia is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. She was not even, like Smyrna or Pergamum, a martyr Church, for whom the supreme honour of witnessing for Christ might well supply the lack of all other titles to honour. Her trials, like her circumstances and her history, seem to have been ordinary and common place. All the more noteworthy and beautiful is the unmingled, unstinted praise bestowed upon her. It may be said, indeed, that this letter is composed altogether of praise and promise. Like that to Smyrna, and unlike all the rest, it contains no word of censure; and the praise is more detailed and definite than even that accorded to Smyrna. Thus we learn that not to great saints and martyrs



alone is it given to live very near to Christ, and to walk so as to please God. He that is faithful in the least will be faithful also in much ; and the highest rewards of the kingdom, the "rule over ten cities," may be earned in the quiet discharge of daily duties, as well as by acts of exceptional heroism. In Smyrna we see the triumphant martyr crowned with glory ; in Philadelphia, the patient follower of Christ in the obscure paths of ordinary life made a pillar in the temple of God. To this Church Christ introduces Himself as the Holy and the True One, and the great Key-Bearer. Only those who truly long after holiness, and therefore must already possess some measure of it, like to think of Christ as the Holy One. To these it is comfort beyond words that He is holy, and that He has promised to make them "partakers of His holiness." "True" does not mean here simply *truthful*, or speaking the truth, but being Himself the essential Truth. The Greek word *alethinos* means genuine, real, perfect, as opposed to unreal, shadowy, imperfect ; "*very*," in its ancient, original meaning, which we retain in the Nicene Creed, "very God." On Christ as the Key-Bearer see Ch. II., Section 2, and note that He who has the power of the keys, uses it in favour of this faithful Church, which, having so far gone forward steadily in her Christian course, had her farther ways made plain before her. The reference in the previous letter to the robe of forgiveness and justification, spoken of in Zech. iii. 4, 5, may fitly lead on to this, which finds a parallel in Zech. iii. 7. To those who "keep His charge" are given wider opportunities ; their "feet are set in a large room." They shall "judge His house," and "keep His courts," and have "places to walk among these that stand by." The "open door" means this, and more also. We read in Scripture of (1) the door of salvation, which is Christ (John x. 9). He is the door pre-eminently,

the "very" or true one. (2) Then, there is the door of faith (Acts xiv. 27), so called because it is by faith, which unites us to Christ, that we enter His Church. There is also (3) a door of utterance (Col. iv. 3) and (4) a door of opportunity (1 Cor. xvi. 9 ; 2 Cor. ii. 12). It is this last which is meant here. More opportunities to work for Christ, and more power to use them, are ever the appropriate rewards of faithfulness, "Unto him that hath shall be given." It may sometimes seem to us as though *every* door was shut before us, but it is never so in reality. "I only wanted one step at a time, and that I always had," is the witness borne, in one form or another, by every one who goes right forward bravely in the path that God appoints. If each day we take our "one step" faithfully, which was just what these Philadelphian Christians did, an open door, and the right door for us, will always stand ready for us. We shall see it *when*, though perhaps not an instant before, we are ready to enter by it. For our own profit this figure of the "open door" admits of further applications. There is the door of prayer ; and there are many doors of privilege. In John x. 9 we read of the sheep going in and out and finding pasture. Christ keeps the keys of all the doors, including those that admit us into the worlds of thought and knowledge, of art and science ; if we go in there, admitted by Him, and taking Him with us, we shall "find pasture." Not only does Christ set before us an open door, He asks us to set an open door before Him (ver. 20). This last must come *first*. We must first admit Him into our hearts ; then will He open before us all doors of privilege and blessing, until at last He opens that door in heaven (ch. iv. 1), whereby, if once we enter, we shall go out no more for ever. "*And no man can shut it*" (R. V. "which none can shut"). This is true universally of the doors Christ opens, because he holds the keys, and is the Lord of all the worlds. But it had a special signi-

ficance as addressed to this Church. They were faithful in the least, they had "little strength" ("a" would be better omitted here), but they used what they had, they "kept His word," amidst opposition of Jews and Gentiles. These adversaries and others (instigated by the great adversary of souls), might and would try to shut the door opened before them *as a Church*, but they should never succeed. This promise has found a singular fulfilment, reaching down throughout the ages. Philadelphia, alone of all the seven, has had an uninterrupted existence as a visible Christian Church, from the day our Lord sent her this message until the present. The story cannot be told better than in the words of the great historian, who, unhappily an unbeliever, yet found himself here—

"Compelled, in spite of scorn,  
To teach a truth he could not learn."

"The captivity or ruin of the seven churches of Asia was consummated," says Gibbon, writing of the year A.D. 1312, "and the barbarous lords of Ionia and Lydia still trample on the monuments of classic and Christian antiquity. In the loss of Ephesus Christians deplored the fall of the first angel—the extinction of the first candlestick of the Revelation. The desolation is complete; the temple of Diana and the church of Mary, will equally elude the search of the anxious traveller. The circus and the three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes; Sardis is reduced to a miserable village; the mosque of Mahommed holds the place of the Church of Christ in Thyatira and Pergamos; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the Emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens

defended their religion and freedom above four-score years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same.”

II. **The best victory**, ch. iii. 9 (Prov. xvi. 7 ; Is. lx. 14). Compare with ch. ii. 9, and see what was said there of the “synagogue of Satan.” The Jews of Philadelphia seem to have been as hostile to the Christians as those of Smyrna ; although, perhaps, they could not carry their hostility to such cruel lengths. This verse, as well as that which precedes and that which follows it, is a promise, and a very remarkable one, introduced by a *double* “Behold,” to call attention to it. The servants of God are often promised victory over their enemies, as in Isaiah liv. 17, and many other passages. But there are two kinds of victory. The usual kind, that which the world universally seeks, and with which it is satisfied, consists in destroying the enemy, or at least reducing him to impotence. This is the victory of Nature. But there is another and higher kind, which may be called the victory of Grace. This consists in slaying—not the enemy—but the enmity—in changing the foe into a friend. This kind of victory is God-like (Rom. v. 10). Christ-like (Eph. ii. 16 ; Col. i. 20-22). It is given to those who please God (Prov. xvi. 7), and who follow Christ most fully and closely. This is what is promised here to the Church of Philadelphia. It is even more than was given to faithful Smyrna, to whom Christ did not promise visible victory *here*.

We have interesting evidence of the fulfilment of the promise, at least by way of earnest. The martyr Ignatius, writing a few years later to the Christians of Philadelphia, congratulated them on those Jewish converts in their midst who had



learned the love of Christ, and were now preaching the faith which once they destroyed. In Isaiah lx. 14, we have a promise given to the Jewish Church with regard to the Gentiles, almost identical with what is given here to Gentiles with regard to the unbelieving Jews—an indication, perhaps, of the oneness of both in Christ. As individuals, we may take this promise for our comfort and encouragement under the hostility which, if we “will live godly in Christ Jesus,” we are sure, at one time or other, to provoke. But it is more than an encouragement—it is a call to duty. It shows us what kind of victory we ought to desire, to aim at, to seek after. To the Church the lesson is yet more striking. It points out to her what should be her endeavour, and the goal of her expectation, in the fulfilment of her divinely appointed mission. Moreover, it opens out vistas of hope in the future, distant as yet and dimly seen, yet most cheering to the heart.

**III. Kept from the hour of temptation, ch. iii. 10, 11** (1 Peter i. 7; 1 Cor. x. 13). Notice here, “*Thou* hast kept,”—“*I* will keep.” He repays their faithfulness, so to speak, in kind, only “exceeding abundantly,” a thousand fold. As we observed before, it is His own grace He crowns and rewards; since it was He who gave them the strength whereby they kept the word. Why the word “*of My patience*”? Probably because it was the word enjoining patience—the patience of faith, the patience of hope, patient waiting, patient endurance. How will He keep them? By “the power of God through faith” (1 Peter i. 5). What “hour of temptation” is intended here? This is a question more difficult to answer. Some think the hour referred to was the time of persecution for the Church, then rapidly approaching (see ch. ii. 10), others that it was the Mohammedan Woe, from which the Philadelphian Church, as we have seen, was in some sense actually “kept.” But then the persecutions

did not come upon "all the world," only upon the Church ; nor does the preservation from Moham-medan oppression seem an adequate fulfilment of the promise here. Hence the reference is taken by others to be to the great final tribulation so often alluded to in Scripture, and still, we believe, in the future (see Matt. xxiv. 21-30 ; Luke xxi. 25-30 ; comparing ver. 19 with the passage before us). This, at least, is certain :—an hour of trial and temptation will come to *all*, whether belonging to the Church or to the world. This sifting time will decide whose and what we are, will test our faithfulness, will make our character manifest both to ourselves and to others. But if we are keeping the word of Christ we need not fear it, for He will keep us safe to the end (1 Cor. x. 13). Christ has two ways of keeping His own—as the Hebrew youths were kept in the furnace, or as Stephen was kept at the place of stoning. He either saves us *from* the temptation or trial, not allowing it to touch us ; or He saves us *in* it, bringing us victorious through it. He suits His dealings with each to the character and to the strength of each, making a way of escape for us according as "we are able to bear it." Not to avoid the suffering, but to be made perfect through it, would seem to be the highest way, and that given to those who are most nearly conformed to His Son. Yet it may be that He sometimes sees that the work of transformation is done already, and that the faithful servant does not need any more of the discipline of trial. And in that case, since His love will not cause one moment of needless pain, He withholds the trial and gives the joy and rest without it. It would seem to be rather the deliverance *from* temptation, so as to be wholly untouched by it, which is meant here, although the other is not absolutely excluded. In ver. 11 the key-note of the book is struck once more (see ch. ii. 5, 16, also chs. xvi. 15 ; xxii. 7, 12). But the words which in chs.

ii. 5, 16, and slightly varied in ch. iii. 5, bear a message of warning, almost of threatening, are here full of encouragement. Like the pillar of cloud and fire, they are light and comfort to the faithful, though great darkness and a consuming fire to the enemies of God. Christ is at hand to relieve our guard, to end our conflict, to reward our faithfulness. That which they already "had," which they had kept, and were keeping, they are now told to "hold fast." Not merely to continue their zeal and faithfulness, but to increase in them. We may be already holding a treasure, but if either its safety is threatened, or its preciousness is brought vividly home to our hearts, our hands tighten upon it, we grasp it, and hold it *fast*. This is just what the Philadelphians were exhorted to do, and what we should do, with the treasure committed to us—"Christ in us the hope of glory." No man can "take" our crown, in the sense of winning it from us to wear for himself. In the kingdom of heaven the law of competition finds no place; the gain of one is not the loss of another, but rather the advantage of all. "Take" means here "snatch away"—not in emulation, but in enmity, as Col. ii. 8. R.V. "no *one*," not "no *man*," as also verse 8, since the most formidable of those adversaries who desire to despoil the Christian of his crown are not "flesh and blood" (Eph. vi. 12). For the nature of the crown see Ch. VI., Section IV., but here observe that it is already "*thy* crown." To each there is destined a special, individual crown. As the name of each, the course of each, the trials and temptations of each, are his peculiarly—his alone—so will be the reward of each. As no two Christians can serve Christ exactly in the same way here, so no two shall enjoy Him exactly in the same way hereafter. "Star differeth from star," not only in the degree, but in the kind of glory,

"And this leaps ruby, this lurks amethyst,"

It follows that if through unfaithfulness we miss or decline the training or the service which He specially appoints for us here, we shall suffer loss (1 Cor. iii. 15). But if we "hold fast," the crown which we shall receive shall be our own in a double sense; peculiarly adapted to us, and peculiarly belonging to us, so as to continue ours for ever.

IV. **A pillar in the temple**, ch. iii. 12 (1 Kings vii. 21; Rev. xxii. 4). This epistle of promise, for such from beginning to end it truly is, concludes and culminates in a grand promise, which is the apex and crown of the whole. It is a double promise, like those to Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis, comprising (1) the pillar; (2) the inscription. (1.) Here, and indeed through the whole promise, the leading idea is *stability and permanence*, emphasized by the addition, "*and he shall go no more out.*" The appropriate reward of the "keeping" and "holding fast," this Church was so emphatically commended for, and encouraged in, would be the being kept fast for ever in the temple of God. Moreover, the local circumstances of Philadelphia lent the promise a peculiar beauty and fitness. The city was built upon volcanic soil, which was well adapted to the cultivation of the vine; but, like other celebrated wine districts, was subject to frequent and disastrous earthquakes. Often had the citizens to abandon their houses, and to pass days and nights of peril and discomfort in the surrounding fields and villages. We can guess how sweet, to men accustomed to these constant alarms, and to the sense of insecurity they could not fail to engender, would be the promise of a home whence they should go no more out. Into this home they should not only be allowed to enter, but be kept there for ever, "steadfast, immovable." They themselves could not desire to go out, nor could any malice of their enemies avail to remove them. "The changes and chances of this troublesome world" are, or have been, the sources of keen



anguish to most of us. We may not, like the Philadelphians, have to fear the upheaval of the solid earth beneath us, but are the homes we build upon it more secure from the changes death and sorrow are sure to bring? Amidst such changes many a heart has stayed itself upon the words, "Lord, *thou* hast been our dwelling-place in all generations" (Ps. xc. 1). It is an added rest to think that in this dwelling place each shall be fixed and established for ever, "a pillar." The two pillars in the porch of Solomon's temple were named by him, the one Jachin, "He shall establish," the other Boaz, "In it is strength." A pillar is not merely placed in a temple for its own security, as for example, a treasure might be (though it is most secure "He shall establish" it), but it adds also to the security of the building, "in it is strength." It is indeed the strongest part of the building, and that which strengthens the rest. When Samson pulled down the pillars of the temple of Gaza (Judges xvi. 22), the whole structure fell with them. In this sense also James, Cephas, and John "were reputed" (R.V.) to be pillars in the Church (Gal. ii. 9), not only very stable members of it, but amongst its chief supports. Only to a few, and in a very modified sense, is it given to be pillars of the Church here; but hereafter each one of the faithful will be a pillar, occupying a place, not only of security, but of *strength* and *usefulness*. *Honour*, when real, is the shadow of usefulness, and in direct proportion to it, therefore this promise assures also a place of honour in the temple of God. Moreover, a pillar is an ornament to a building, a thing of *beauty* and *glory*. See the elaborate picture of the adornment of Solomon's pillars (1 Kings vii. 15-22.) Note the burnished brass for brightness, the pomegranates for fruitfulness, the lilies for loveliness. So "all fair" shall be the redeemed hereafter. (2.) Is the figure carried forward here, and the inscription to be

written on the pillar? Or, is it dropped, and a new figure taken up; the inscription, in that case, being written upon the conqueror himself, probably on his forehead? (see chs. xiv. 1; xxii. 4). The latter would seem more probable, though the former is by no means inadmissible, as inscriptions used often to be placed upon pillars, and very suitably, on account of their conspicuous situation. But, either way, the meaning is the same. Upon the pillar, or upon him who is the pillar, three names are to be written. (1) The Name of God; (2) the Name of the New Jerusalem; (3) the New Name of Christ. Here three leading thoughts are suggested to us—(1) Possession; (2) Citizenship; (3) Similitude. (1.) The thought of possession or ownership is the chief one, and runs through the whole. We place our name on or in a book, or anything else that we value, to show that it is ours. So with the name of the Beast (ch. xiii. 17), those who received it belonged to him. A fine illustration of this passage is the story of the Russian peasant, who, taken prisoner by the French in the invasion of 1812, was branded by them in the hand with the letter N. "That is the name of our Emperor," said they, "now you belong to him." "Take what belongs to your Emperor," replied the brave Russian, instantly severing his hand from the arm with the axe that hung in his girdle,—“As for me, I belong wholly to the Czar.” So, even here and now, we belong wholly to God, by creation, by purpose, and by purchase, and we trust also by willing self-surrender. But hereafter this ownership shall be a full, perfect reality, never again to be marred or spoiled by self and sin. (2.) He who belongs to God belongs also to the city of God; is a citizen, with all the rights and immunities which citizenship confers. (See Phil. iii. 20, R.V.) For the New Jerusalem, see Gal. iv. 26; Heb. xii. 22, and ch. xxi. 10. We shall return to this subject, and only notice here the

word "new," one of the key-notes of this book. "New song," "new name," "new Jerusalem," "new heavens and new earth," "all things new." Not new in order of time, as contrasted with old; but new, as fresh and unworn, "contrasted with that which has seen service, the outworn, the effete, and marred through age." Such was the earthly Jerusalem, and all which belonged to it. (3.) In the promise to Pergamum we hear of our new name, in this (and in ch. xix. 12) of Christ's. We cannot know now what this new name is; but as each name which He has revealed to us hitherto has shown us something of His character, or some relationship in which He stands to us (*e.g.*, Saviour, Redeemer, Friend), so doubtless this will reveal Him as yet more and better to us than hitherto we have thought or dreamed, surpassing all our hopes and expectations. The name written upon the conqueror (in the most conspicuous place, his forehead, ch. xxii. 4) shows not only that he belongs wholly to Christ, but also that this shall be visible to all, for he will reflect His character, and seeing Him as He is, shall be perfectly like Him (1 John iii. 2; 2 Cor. iii. 18).

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA (Rev. iii. 14-22).

I. **The lukewarm church**, ch. iii. 14-16 (1 Kings xviii. 21, 2 Chron. xxv. 2, Ps. ci. 2, cxix. 2, 3). The city of Laodicea was situated between Philadelphia and Colosse. It was founded, or at least rebuilt, by Antiochus II., the King of Syria (or the North), mentioned in Dan. xi. 6. He called it Laodicea, after his wife Laodice, whom he divorced to marry Bernice, the King's daughter of the South, *i.e.*, of Egypt, according to the prophecy. Subsequently, Laodice caused him to be poisoned, and Bernice and her son to be murdered. The city

named for this wronged, revengeful woman grew and prospered ; and in the time of St John was celebrated for its wealth, which was derived chiefly from commerce. The Church in it appears to have been founded by immediate disciples of St Paul, although *not* by the great apostle himself. See Col. ii. 1, 2. This passage shows the deep interest he felt in her prosperity, and the share she had in his prayers. Next to the love the pastor or teacher bears to his own spiritual children, comes that which springs up in his heart towards *their* children, the fruit of their work for Christ, and therefore also of his own. It would appear that St Paul not only prayed for the Church of Laodicea, but also laboured for her edification, since, while he directs the epistle to the Colossians to be read in Laodicea, he alludes to an epistle from Laodicea to be read in like manner to the Church of Colosse. But it is certain that no *genuine* epistle of St Paul to the Laodiceans has come down to us. Either therefore this epistle has perished ; or it is the epistle to the Ephesians which is meant here, as that epistle, which was addressed to the Metropolitan Church, probably circulated amongst them all, and would naturally come "from Laodicea" to Colosse.

The message to Archippus which follows (Col. iv. 17), taken in connection with Philemon 2, may be the basis of the tradition that Archippus, the son of Philemon, was the first bishop of the Church of Laodicea ; and, as some think, he may have been the "angel," addressed by our Lord some thirty years afterwards in the letter before us. If this be true, the connection with St Paul, through his "dearly beloved and fellow labourer" (Philemon), was a very close one. Archippus must have enjoyed singular advantages, not only in common with the highly privileged Church of Colosse, but as the son of St Paul's host and intimate friend. Yet in the message addressed



to him, we detect already a note of warning, as if the fellow soldier St Paul greeted (Phil. 2, with a play upon the meaning of his name, *chief horse-man*), needed to be reminded of his high calling. To the children of Christian parents, whose position leads them naturally to engage in Christian work, and gives them signal facilities for so doing, the lesson is a solemn one. *Reflected light fades.* The fear of God which is "taught by the precept of men," the zeal for His work which imitation and example so easily foster in a young and ardent nature, will not stand the test of time, of temptation, and of contact with the varied experiences of life. If Archippus was really the angel of the epistle before us, it is too evident that, although raised to high office in the Church, probably in part at least on his father's account, he did not inherit the love and faith of his father, for which Paul so emphatically gave thanks (Philemon 4). He did *not* "take heed to the ministry" which he had received "to fulfil it," and so he, and the church which imbibed his teaching and reflected his character, passed through the downward stages of declension, until there was nothing whatever left in their state which the Lord could find to praise. Indeed, His awful words of warning recall the description of the unfruitful land which "is rejected and nigh unto cursing" (Heb. vi. 8). Yet to the doctrines taught in Laodicea there is no objection made. Like Sardis, Laodicea seems to have been free both from heresies within the church, and from persecution without. It was not the "dry light" of orthodoxy which was wanting in her, but the light of life. Unlike Sardis, there were not even "a few names" found in her, to be excepted from the general condemnation. To this church, to whom our Lord had to send a message which would absolutely reverse all she had hitherto thought of herself, He insists on His essential truth. "Amen" is a Hebrew word, carried into

Greek in the gospel of St John, where our Lord often uses it. In our version it is translated "verily," and is a frequent prefix to His solemn utterances. He Himself is the truth, consequently all He speaks is truth. It is this word which is used in Isaiah lxxv. 16, where "God of truth" is "God of Amen," so that Christ here takes to Himself one of the names of Jehovah. He is the "everlasting yes," affirming and confirming all His promises, and all our hopes which rest on Him. It is only here that the word is used as a noun, and a name of Christ. For "faithful witness," see Ch. I., Section III., for "true" (*alethinos*), see Ch. X., Section I. "*The beginning of the creation of God*" might at first sight seem to mean that our Lord is the first of created Beings, and therefore Himself a creature. But the church which had had the epistle to the Colossians read in her midst was not likely to fall into this mistake. She would recall the similar language of Col. i. 15, with the magnificent explanation which follows, showing us the Eternal Son, not as created, but as Creator, the source and object of all things, and Him by whom they "consist," or hold together. He is the Beginning of the creation in the sense of being its source, not in that of being a part of it. The works of this church showed her condition, her state, as works are sure to do. It has been said, and with truth, that "it matters infinitely less what we do than what we are;" but then what we do is the evidence of what we are. Our Lord goes on to censure in words of terrible strength the state of Laodicea. But why does He say, "*I would thou wert cold or hot?*" Can it be that absolute hostility, or at least complete indifference to Him, is better than languid liking, half and half discipleship? It is certainly more honest and more hopeful. A hearty foe may be more easily converted into a hearty friend than a half-hearted friend into a thorough and zealous one. Moreover, he who is

"cold" may be so because he had not the opportunities and privileges of others, because the sacred fire may never have come near him, and therefore his guilt and condemnation may be less than that of him to whom more has been given. There is a radical difference between the lukewarm water here and the smoking flax of Matt. xii. 20. The one denotes a *state*, the other a *stage*. All water which boils was lukewarm *once*, but it did not continue so. The faintest true desire God-ward, the weakest turning towards Him which is real, these are acceptable in His sight, and are not to be quenched, but strengthened. But where time passes, and there is no action, no growth, where the same languid interest continues month after month, year after year, then this is the lukewarm state, and it becomes the most hopeless in the world. It is the state of those who are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Moreover, since nothing, either in the physical or the moral world, is really stationary, the continuance is merely apparent. That which does not grow must decay. Twilight cannot last, it must pass. It is either the morning twilight, which tends towards, and culminates in, the perfect day; or the evening twilight, which sinks into night, and ends in the blackness of darkness for ever.

II. Christ counselling, ch. iii. 17-19 (Hosea xii. 8; 1 Cor. iv. 7; Luke xviii. 14; Deut. xxiii. 13-16). Laodicea was, as we should say, a city of merchant princes. The wealth which her citizens acquired by traffic in all parts of the world they expended right royally, lavishing vast sums upon the embellishment of their native town. Like other cities of Asia Minor, she suffered terribly from the earthquakes which devastated the province during the reign of Tiberias. But her public-spirited citizens immediately restored the ruined buildings, and with increased magnificence, wholly at their own

expense, rejecting that aid from the Roman government which even wealthy Sardis accepted with gratitude. Thus also Laodicea said of herself, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Of course it was not for *this* that she was blamed by our Lord, nor were these the riches of which she so vainly boasted herself. Yet, as we have seen before, temporal wealth and prosperity have a strong tendency to foster spiritual pride and self-satisfaction. "In all time of our wealth, good Lord deliver us!" is a prayer which fits a very deep and real need. Even the spirit of self help, which is so right and praiseworthy, and which indeed is especially inculcated in scripture (1 Thess. iv. 11, 12; 2 Thess. iii. 10), has its snares and temptations. We have need to remember who it is that giveth us "the power to get wealth;" and that "what God gives us through the work of our own fingers and brains *comes straight from Him.*" These Laodiceans, satisfied with themselves, their circumstances and their attainments, thought that all was going on with them as well inwardly as no doubt it was outwardly. But how different Christ's estimate and their own! "Knowest not that thou art *the wretched one* (R.V.), and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." All Christless souls are wretched; but "*the wretched one,*" emphatically and pre-eminently, is he who knows not his own need, but thinks already that he has all things. "*Miserable,*" unhappy, worthy of all compassion, even though unconscious of his need;—as a madman who fancies himself a king, as a benighted traveller drawing unconsciously near a precipice of the existence of which he is not aware. "*Poor,*" not in spirit, but in fact;—as he who sits complacently reckoning up his goodly store of bank notes, unknowing that the bank has failed, and that he is a pauper. "*Blind.*" See John ix. 41; 2 Peter i. 9. They were blind to



their own state, to "the things not seen which are eternal," and to the love of Christ. "*Naked*," exposed, unprotected, without the righteousness of Christ, and therefore liable to be "ashamed before Him at His coming."

*I counsel thee, &c.* Archbishop Trench says:—"There is a slight touch of irony, but the irony of divine love in the words." He who might command, stoops to counsel. To this merchant city He comes in the guise of a merchant. He proposes His goods for the acceptance of its citizens, inviting them to hold commerce with Him. But how can "the wretched one" and the "poor" be asked to "*buy*"?—See Isaiah lv. 1. This merchant sells "without money and without price;" that is to say, He gives freely, as a king. And yet there is a sense in which His blessings must be bought. See Prov. xxiii. 23. They would have to part with their own fancied wealth before they could receive His true riches. The wealth indeed was *but* fancied; yet not the less would it cost a struggle to fling it away, and to come emptied of all to Him, that they might receive all out of His fulness. "*Buy of me*," in whom, as they had long ago been told, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. ii. 3). The gold, tried, pure, unalloyed, may represent the unsearchable riches of Christ. Or possibly the faith by which we appropriate these (see 1 Peter i. 7), and which is itself the gift of God (Eph. ii. 8), and Christ its Author and Finisher (Heb. xii. 2). For the white raiment see on ver. 5. The word *collyrium* (from another word meaning a roll or stick of coarse bread), here translated eye salve, was doubtless an allusion to a celebrated article of local commerce, well known to the Laodiceans. Christ gives spiritual sight, opening the eyes blinded by sin and ignorance. This He does by His Spirit, and precious ointment is one of the appropriate emblems of the Spirit (Ex. xxx. 25, Cant. i. 3; iv. 10). Thus to this lukewarm, self-

righteous, callous-hearted church, "nigh unto cursing" as she was, the way to return is still open ; nay, the richest spiritual gifts are still placed, and placed freely, within her grasp. The voice of Christ says to her, "Pursue : for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all " (1 Sam. xxx. 8).

III. **Christ knocking**, chap. iii. 20 (Cant. v. 2 ; John xiv. 21-23). Christ does much more than open the way, and place the blessings within the grasp of the Church of Laodicea. His tenderness is beautifully exemplified in His dealings with her. He rebukes, He chastens, He condemns even, with trenchant severity, yet He loves ! Nay, He does all these things *because* He loves. "*As many as I love,*" &c. Of the two Greek words which signify *love*, and are thus translated in the New Testament, Christ here chooses the warmer (*philo*), while even to faithful Philadelphia the other and less personal word is used, ver. 9. Not in this word alone, but in the whole epistle, from ver. 18 to the end, we have touching evidence of Christ's yearning over those who are far from Him, and even over the most disappointing and hopeless class of all—those who have departed far from truth once known and apparently loved. In this the heart of the Father and the heart of the Son are one. While "he was yet a great way off" (Luke xv. 20) the father saw, and ran to meet the prodigal ; and the shepherd goes after that which was lost "until He find it." We have here a climax, showing deeper and yet deeper solicitude on the part of the Shepherd over these lost sheep. Christ "counsels," Christ "loves," Christ "stands and knocks." Still the wanderer, thus sought and yearned for, cannot be brought back without much pain to himself, and Christ's love is too true and wise to shrink from the infliction of this pain. There is another climax here—Christ first counsels, then rebukes ; then, if rebuke be unheeded, he chastens. "Be zealous."

Stir up your hearts, recover the warmth you have lost,—“and repent,” turn unto Him with the whole heart, for without this change of heart and life nothing else can avail. What follows is introduced, as it well may be, by the emphatic “Behold !” It is indeed a wonder. To this last and worst of the churches Christ reveals himself in unutterable love and gentleness. Only here and in one other place is the ascended Christ—who sat down for ever at the right hand of God—said to *stand*. He was seen *standing* to receive His faithful witness, Stephen, Acts vii. 56. And here He Himself says, “*I stand*”—as a suppliant at the door of the church, and of the heart. Of course it is by His Spirit that He stands thus: but the standing, the waiting, the knocking, are not a whit less real, not a whit less the acts of Christ Himself for that. In the first instance this was addressed to the Church of Laodicea as a church; then to each member of it; then to each one everywhere who has ears to hear, ver. 22. Christ knocks at the door of the heart in many ways: by His word, read or preached; by His providences; His chastenings; the stings of conscience, &c. He does not, as we so often do, go away when not at once admitted. He stands and waits. He is so patient because He is so loving.

“Behold ! a stranger at the door ;  
 He gently knocks, has knocked before,  
 Has waited long, is waiting still—  
 You use no other friend so ill.”

Some do not hear the knock at all, being “busy here and there,” or deafened with the noises of the world going on continually around them. Others hear as in sleep; like the bride in the Song of Songs (Cant. v. 2, 6, a warning against *putting off* the opening of the door); others hear and wilfully disregard. But some there are who hear and obey, who open the door and admit Christ into their hearts. Even for *this*, be it remembered, the aid

of His Spirit is needed, but that aid is refused to none who ask. "Take my heart, for I cannot give it to Thee ; keep it, for I cannot keep for Thee," prayed St Augustine. When the door is opened Christ comes in, not as a passing visitor, a "way-faring man" (Jer. xiv. 8), but to abide for ever. He eats and drinks with us. He is our guest, putting upon us the honour of entertaining Him ; while at the same time we are His, for He brings His own provision with Him. *We* have not anything, in our poor, bare, empty hearts, wherewith to entertain Him, but He comes to us laden with gifts, supplying all our need. We have *communion* with Him and He with us. We have joy, rejoicing in Him ; and, what is far more strange, He rejoices in us. We feed on Him ; He feeds on the fruits of our faith and love, which He has Himself implanted in us (Cant. v. 1). Thus He dwells in us and we in Him. This indwelling and intercommunion of love is known even now to those who belong to Christ. They experience it when they come in faith to His Table, and at other times also, if they are abiding in Him. But they shall reach its full realisation and culmination hereafter, at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

IV. **Enthroned with Christ**, ch. iii. 21 (Luke xxii. 28-30 ; John xvii. 22, 24). After the invitation to communion comes fitly the promise of dominion. The last of the series of promises is also the most splendid (See Ch. I., Section III.). The series begins with the Garden of Eden, and ends with the Throne of God ; embracing thus the whole cycle of Scripture, the whole history of fallen, redeemed, and glorified man. It is remarkable that this, the grandest of the promises, should fall to the lot of the least faithful church, in which our Lord found everything to blame and nothing to praise. It is to "the wretched one," the miserable, the poor, that Christ offers the throne of glory, see 1 Sam. ii. 8.



There is comfort and encouragement here, even for that most hopeless class of all, whose languid indifference and lukewarmness seem harder to reach and change than downright hostility. Child of Laodicea, look up to Him who is ready to pardon even *you*, and to “restore unto you the years which the canker-worm hath eaten,” those long years of indifference, of death in life, or life in death. Awake ! arise ! “Be zealous, and repent,” and to you, even to you, there may yet be given the victor’s joy and glory, the throne, the crown, the dominion over all things. “*I will give to sit,*” &c., the position of rest. In ver. 4 the victor is said to *walk*. Note the combination of activity and repose. “They rest from their labours,” yet, “they rest not day or night.” It is also the position of honour and of permanence. He who expects to be sent hither and thither stands waiting ; he whose work is done and whose place is secure, sits. “*With Me.*” This is the core and centre of all the promises. It is only as joined with Christ and in union with Him that we can inherit them, and this union and partaking infinitely increases their joy and preciousness. *In My throne.* In order to make the imagery of this passage clear to our minds, we must picture a throne after the Oriental fashion, not a chair, but a seat capable of holding more than one. This is but imagery however, meant to afford us a faint foreshadowing of truths beyond our present comprehension. Throughout this book God the Father is described to us as seated on the throne of glory, might, majesty, and dominion, in the Heaven of heavens—see especially ch. iv. Beside Him—nay, in the very midst of the throne—“the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal”—sits the Divine Son. He sits there as man, in His human nature, one who has suffered and bled, who has passed through the grave and gate of death, a willing, spotless sacrifice—“a Lamb as it had been slain.” Only in His own words can we dare to tell

the rest ;—that they who overcome shall sit beside Him there. “Dark with excessive bright,” the prospect baffles and dazzles our weak sight. We cannot tell *all* that is meant ; nay, we could not understand if it were told to us now. We place it beside that other wonderful word, “Partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Peter i. 4), and recognise how truly “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Yet there is a word here which we *can* comprehend, and which touches us more perhaps than all the promised glory—“*Even as I also overcame.*” The glorified Christ, who makes us one with Him, makes Himself also one with us. He remembers His own overcoming, and deigns to liken ours to it. He deigns to say that His own reward shall be ours also. And if He remembers the overcoming, He remembers also the steps that led to it—the temptation, the suffering, the conflict. In every step of the weary way we see his footprints, showing us that He has gone before us. He also looks down from His place in Heaven, and sees us treading the well-remembered path. “I can go with you every step of the way,” we say to one who is travelling a road our feet have gone before. Christ says this to us, and more also, since—not in fancy but in truest truth—He does walk side by side with us by His Spirit, until at last He will set us side by side with Him in His throne.\*

## THE ONE COMPLETE AND GLORIFIED CHURCH (Rev. xxi. 9-27).

**I. The Church one**—the Bride of Christ, ch. xxi. 9 (Ps. xlv. 10-13 ; Eph. v. 25, 27 ; iv. 4). We have been considering several churches, differing in their circumstances, characters, needs, graces, failings. Backsliding Ephesus, faithful Smyrna, lukewarm

\* For many of the descriptive touches, and the local and historical allusions, given in the foregoing pages, the writer is indebted to “The Seven Golden Candlesticks,” by the Rev. H. B. Tristram.

Laodicea, have passed in review before us. In each case the angel of the church, and through him the church of the city named, was addressed. We read also of the churches of Galatia (Gal. i. 2 ; 1 Cor xvi. 1) ; of the church at Corinth (1 Cor. i. 2), the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. i. 1) ; and even of the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. xvi. 5), in the house of Nymphas (Col. iv. 15), and in that of Philemon (Phil. 2). There were then many churches ; and it is very evident that, like Christian churches in our own day, they were composed of faithful and unfaithful members, the wheat and the tares growing together until the harvest. All professed to follow Christ, so they formed *professing* churches. All were united together in definite organizations, possessing rules, rites, and symbols, therefore they formed *visible* churches. But we find throughout Scripture that the *Church* is spoken of as one. Even in the Old Testament it is ever “thee” and “thou” (as in Is. lx. 1, 2), and this not only when Zion and Jerusalem are intended, but when the spirit of prophecy, glancing onwards through the ages, foretells the ingathering of the Gentiles. When Christ appears, this truth becomes much clearer. His prayer for His disciples is that “they all may be one,” His prophecy that there shall be “one flock and one Shepherd” (John xvii. 21 ; x. 16, R.V.). But it is in the writings of St Paul that it is revealed to us in full clearness. There the Church is shown to us as *one body* (Rom. xii. 4 ; 1 Cor. x. 17, &c.), and this no other, and no less, than the Body of Christ Himself (1 Cor. xii. 27). He is the Head (Eph. i. 22), and all the members are one with Him, and one in Him with each other. (Note that local churches, as Ephesus, Smyrna, &c., are never called members of the body of Christ ; it is each individual believer, united to Christ by a living faith, who is a member of Christ, 1 Cor. xii. 27 ; Eph. iv. 25).

As all together make one body, so all together make one bride. There never is, and never can be, more than one ; even as Christ Himself, the Heavenly Bridegroom, is One. All applications of the Scriptural term "Bride of Christ" to *individuals* are therefore utterly false and misleading. Christ calls each one who will do the will of God, "my mother, my sister, my brother." "But," as Mrs Charles has so well observed, "one name He calls you not. So carefully, so jealously, does the Bible keep guard over the barrier which divides tenderness from sentimentalism, mystery from mysticism. He calls no one of you, 'My Bride.' The Bride of Christ is one. Not to the Church does our Lord say 'My mother, My sister.' Not to the individual does He say 'My spouse.' The day is coming when the whole multitude of the redeemed, cleansed in one fountain, tried in many fires, shall rise as one spotless, consecrated company, to share for ever the keeping of the New Paradise, the Bride of the Lamb, the Eve of the second Adam. That company is being gathered, tried, purified now." \* Already in the Old Testament, Jehovah, the God of Israel, revealed Himself to His chosen people in the character of a Bridegroom or Husband (Jer. xxxi. 32 ; Isa. liv. 5). When Israel forsook Him, and went after other gods, she was reproached as an unfaithful wife (Ez. xvi. ; Hosea i. 1 ; ii. 2-13). But mingled strangely with reproaches and denunciations come prophecies of wondrous beauty, pointing to a pure and spotless Bride, and a glorious bridal feast yet future (see Hosea ii. 19-23 ; Isa. lxii. 2-5). That these belong not to the Jewish church only, but to the whole church gathered from amongst Jews and Gentiles alike, was intimated in the prophecies themselves, and afterwards revealed fully to the holy Apostles and Prophets under the New Covenant (Eph. iii. 5, 6). All are one body

\* "Winifred Bertram."



in Christ ; His Church, His Bride. Ps. xlv. contains one of the most remarkable of these Old Testament prophecies, and is expressly applied to Christ (Heb. i. 8, 9). We have there the call of the Bride to her high destiny, ver. 10 ; her glory and beauty, ver. 13 ; her presentation to the King, ver. 14 ; and the joy and gladness of the bridal, ver. 15. For the full development of the thought however, see Ephesians v. 23 to end. We gather from this wonderful passage that as every fatherhood in heaven and earth is "named from" the Divine Father (Eph. iii. 15, R.V., marg.)—as He is the archetype of all fatherhood,—so Christ, the Divine Bridegroom, is the archetype of that other grand and sacred human relationship, which from the time of its institution was intended to foreshadow what He should be to His Church. We see Him then (1) loving the Church, which He has chosen from all eternity. (2) Coming to seek her. (3) Obtaining her for His own, both by right of conquest and of purchase, and betrothing her unto Himself. (4) Then for a while withdrawing His visible presence, so that the Church, in the present dispensation, is like a bride awaiting the coming of the bridegroom, and the accomplishment of the marriage. (5) During this interval she has to keep herself true to Him in thought, word, and deed. (6) And soon "He that shall come will come ;" and then shall take place the presentation of the Bride unto Himself, "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27 ; Jude 24) ; the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. xix. 7-9), and finally (7) He will take her into His home, share with her all that He has, and make her one with Him for ever—for an eternity of joy in His presence and His love.

**II. The Church a great multitude—the Holy City,** ch. xxi. 10 (Heb. xii. 22, 23 ; Rev. vii. 9, 10). The one Body and the one Bride include and comprise a

great multitude whom no man can number. The unity of all does not confound or destroy, but rather emphasizes and assures, the sacred separate individuality of each. The more intensely we realise our membership of the mystical Body, our part in the mystical Bride, the more we shall also realise our preciousness to Christ as individuals, redeemed and loved each one for him or herself, that personal redemption and love being our security for a personal immortality of bliss. For us, whom Christ loves, there is no "Nirvana," no mere absorption into the infinite. The final word of our destiny is not "The dew-drop slips into the shining sea," but "His servants shall serve Him ; they shall see His face : and His name shall be in their foreheads." The vastness of the multitude is a helpful and encouraging thought. We are often perplexed and saddened by the fewness of those who in any one place or time seem to us to be following Christ. But when those few are gathered together from *every* place and time, they will form an exceeding great multitude : without even reckoning the millions who die in infancy, and who, we doubt not, are accepted in the covenant-Head and Redeemer of the race. On wider questions we cannot touch here ; only we know that He, who was made perfect through suffering in order that He might bring *many* sons to glory, shall see of the travail of His soul, and *be satisfied*. But this multitude, greater than the sand on the sea shore, shall not, like the sand, consist of separate, disjointed atoms. It is a city, an organized community. There are two senses in which we use the term city. Sometimes we intend the material part, the streets and buildings of which it is composed ;—as when we say, "Paris is in some respects a more beautiful city than London." Sometimes, on the other hand, we mean the inhabitants, *e.g.*, "The city of London took the popular side in the civil war." In both

these senses it is used here. For this great multitude of the Redeemed a dwelling-place is prepared. It is called a house, containing "many mansions," and Christ says He goes to prepare it for us (John xiv. 2). In Heb. xi. 16 it is called a city, and the work of preparation ascribed to the Father, who is said to be the builder and maker of it (xi. 10, with iii. 4). Something may be guessed of the wonder and glory of that city which God Himself has built and prepared. But its permanence and stability in contrast to all earthly dwelling-places, seem to be specially dwelt upon. It has foundations, mansions, *i.e.*, permanent places of abode. It is called Jerusalem (Heb. xii. 22), as the home of God's chosen people, of which the material Jerusalem was the type and symbol (Ps. xlv. 4, 5 ; xlviii. 2 ; lxxxvii. 3). But it is the *New Jerusalem* in contrast with the Old (ch. iii. 12 ; xxi. 2), the heavenly (Heb. xii. 22), in contrast with the earthly, the holy in contrast with that which was so deeply stained with sin. The dwelling-place shall be in every way suited to the inhabitants. No doubt it is the state, not the place which makes heaven, yet it is clearly revealed to us that there is a *place* prepared and destined for the redeemed. Here the glory of God will shine forth in some way as yet to us incomprehensible. And the Lamb will be the light thereof, the Divine and Human Christ will dwell in it and walk in it. As God he is everywhere, but as Man He is *somewhere*. That one place in the universe where He is, is heaven, and where He is there shall also His servants be. But that the city here means, also (and perhaps chiefly) the inhabitants, is shewn by her identification with the Bride, by the allegory of St Paul, Gal. iv. 22-27, and by Heb. xii. 22, 23. In all these passages it is the Church of Christ ; the *living* city, as well as the city of the living God. Already its citizens are enrolled (Phil. iii. 20, R. V.), they are "free ;" they shall be holy, heavenly,

glorious and happy beyond compare. Of this heavenly city, earthly cities are a faint far-off type in their greatness, their glory, their renown ; in the surging fulness of a common life which throbs through them ; in their gathering within themselves all that is most magnificent in the world of art, most splendid and brilliant in the world of humanity.

“The choice of the race are there,  
The wonders of life and gladness—  
All the wonders of hope and fear ;  
The wonders of death and sadness,  
All the wonders of time are there.”

True, it is “the wonders of death and sadness,” which make our earthly cities a terrible contrast to the heavenly city. Into that city there shall enter nothing that defileth, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, neither crying, neither shall there be any more pain.

“The crowds are there ; but the sadness  
Is fled with the toil and pain ;  
Nought is heard but the song of gladness,  
’Tis the city of holy men.”

**III. The foundations and gates of the Church,** ch. xxi. 12-21 (1 Cor. iii. 11 ; Eph. ii. 20, 22 ; Isa. liv. 11, 12). The New Jerusalem will be not only illumined, but luminous, not only light receiving, but light giving—like a planet. She shall be glorious, because having the glory of God ; His presence is both the light that shines in her, and the light that shines from her (compare ver. 11 with ch. iv. 3). The precise characteristic of the glory meant to be indicated by the jasper is difficult to decide. It is usual to class the jasper as a red stone, but Dean Alford and others take it to represent “a watery crystalline brightness.” The sardine which is coupled with it in Rev. iv. 3, and is on all hands acknowledged to be a fiery red, is not mentioned here. Does this mean that in the New Jerusalem God will not be seen in His more terrible aspects,



as a consuming fire (Heb. xii. 29), but only as bright, pure, intense light? The city "had a wall great and high." This is for strength and security, to keep out every enemy, and everything that defileth. Yet there shall be full liberty, for there are twelve gates open day and night. By these shall enter the kings and the nations who bring their tribute, and who shall no doubt share in the blessings of which it is the centre. Perhaps by these also the redeemed shall "go in and out," when as His servants they serve Him,—it may be on the earth or in other worlds. The careful enumeration of north, south, east, and west, ver. 13, reminds us of Luke xiii. 29. The denizens of this city will have come from "ice-bound Labrador" in the far north, from purple islands of the south, from wild forests of the distant west, from ancient cities of the storied east. Each gate is kept by an angel, but not now with a flaming sword to exclude man from Paradise, Christ having reversed the primeval curse, and opened the new and living way. Each gate bears the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, showing that in the New Jerusalem Jew and Gentile are both included, both one in Christ. No doubt the names are those given in ch. vii. "Every several gateway is one pearl, for all find entrance into the city through the pearl of great price" (see "Names on the Gates of Pearl," by the Rev. C. H. Waller, in which this subject is followed out in a very interesting and instructive way). \* Ver. 14 shows the name of an apostle of Christ inscribed on a foundation stone, between each pearly gate bearing the name of a patriarch of Israel. There is no contradiction between this and the parallel passage (Eph. ii. 20) on the one hand, and the great truth taught in 1 Cor. iii. 11 on the other.

\* The preceding pages contain several quotations from unpublished sermons by the Rev. C. H. Waller, and from notes, with which he kindly furnished the writer.

Christ is truly "the Church's one foundation." Upon this "Rock" beneath the ground, the whole building rests in impregnable security. But the first to be laid upon it are large and goodly stones, which are called in a real, though subordinate sense, foundation stones. They are nearest to the foundation, all the others rest upon them and are supported by them. This place in the Church of Christ is occupied by the apostles, who were not only its first members, but through whose words, spoken or written, all the others have been gathered in. Here each foundation stone is a precious stone (compare Ex. xxxix. 10-14). Thus the precious stones with the names inscribed on them (representative of the Church of Christ, both Jew and Gentile) are found in two places: on the breast of the High Priest, and in the wall of the Holy City. A Joseph or a St John is borne upon the heart of Christ; and just *because of this* he is a stone of weight and power in the Church of Christ, strong to support and to bear up the rest. This is true of all faithful ministers, and even of all faithful believers; for each is a stone of the Temple, and each name, the lowliest as well as the most honoured, is graven on the breast of Christ. These foundation stones are "pure fountains of light and colour," beautiful and costly. This gives us a vivid picture of the glory of the heavenly city. Think of the ruby or the sapphire—which, as a tiny spark of coloured light, shines in its golden setting amongst our treasured jewels,—a vast, solid wave of glory through which the light within streams out in rays of crimson or of blue. But more than glory or beauty must be meant here, as we infer from the careful enumeration of the precious stones, each by its own name. Some of the stones, it is true, are difficult or impossible to identify; but this, for our purpose, is of little consequence, and it may be worth while to give a slight description of each, although one or

two, or even more, may be only conjectured. "Jasper, red (but see what has been said before); Sapphire, blue; Chalcedony, pure, lustrous, waxy white; Emerald, deep, full green; Sardonyx, red sardine and white chalcedony in turn; Sardius, blood red; Chrysolite, clear transparent green; Beryl, pale blue; Topaz, yellow; Chrysoprasus, bright, leek green; Jacinth, purple; Amethyst, violet." All these stones, alike beautiful and costly, though not perhaps in the same degree, resemble each other in another respect. All are dug out of the depths and the darkness (see Isa. li. 1). All, when first taken in hand are dull, shapeless, devoid of beauty. They have to be polished and cut by the hand of skill and patience; until what needed a careful and educated eye to discern it from a common stone, becomes a thing of beauty, fit to sparkle in a monarch's diadem. So Christ chooses, seeks, cuts, polishes, prepares the stones that are to shine in His crown (Isa. lxii. 3). But their unlikeness has its lessons for us also. They differ both in transparency and in colour. Some have greater powers of transmitting light than others. Some are fully, splendidly transparent, some are duller, some even semi-opaque. Some of the children of God receive more of His light, and reflect it more clearly than do others. Even in the New Jerusalem, though all shall be perfect in the sense of being quite free from sin, all shall not be equally glorious, shall not shine with equal lustre. Yet it is in colour that the chief difference lies. Colour is reflected light—the object upon which the light falls absorbing by the law of its existence certain rays of the mystic seven, and giving back, or reflecting the rest. It is these reflected rays that we see. God is light, and each soul He shines upon reflects Him more or less. Some reflect one ray of the Divine light, and some another. Hence the differences of character in the Church. Applying this

to the subject before us, it might be an interesting exercise of the imagination to assign to each his appropriate stone ; to read the name of St John upon the pure azure of the sapphire, the very colour of heaven itself, that of St Paul on the deep and fiery heart of the sardius. More important is it to note that all varieties of temperament, of natural and of Christian character, have their place in the city of God. For these foundation stones are representative, each living stone comes in as laid upon one or other of them. There is a place for each, and each diversity of colour adds to the glory of the whole. Amongst these stones one, the most precious of all, is not to be found. There is no name inscribed upon the diamond—that stone which reflects *all* the rays of light, which “answers all possibilities of gaze, and overpowers the eye intent upon its deeper mysteries.” Is it because One only, in the moral and spiritual world, answers to this description : He in whom there shines forth all the glory of God ? (see on ch. ii. 17). He in His Divine glory is the light of the New Jerusalem ; from whom pearly gates and golden streets and walls of jasper receive all that shines in them, through them, and from them.

IV. **The Church complete and perfect**, ch. xxi. 22-27 (Eph. iv. 13 ; v. 27 ; Rev. xxii. 3-5). We read, ver. 16, that the city lieth four square, &c. This could scarcely be true of a literal city, because the height of it would not be likely to equal the length and the breadth. It is the description of a cube, or solid square ; the type of stability, completeness, and perfection. “Always erect, always equal.” So shall be the Church as a whole, so shall be each individual member comprising it. Those who have studied the nature of crystals, and the laws of their formation, tell us that each is composed of innumerable minute particles, each particle the



exact form of the united whole. Thus, in the general assembly and church of the first-born, each member shall be as the whole, complete and perfect. He who will present unto Himself a glorious Church—one Church—"not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing," will, at the same time and as a part of that Church, present each one of us "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." The eternal place and state of each is given us in that glorious three-fold cord of promise (ch. xxii. 3, 4), "His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads,"—serving Him, seeing Him, being like Him—the three great longings of the renewed heart, fully satisfied. The glory and the bliss of all is chiefly described by negatives—easier for us to comprehend because of our larger experience of evil things than of good. No exclusion; no night (ch. xxi. 25). No defilement (xxi. 27). No curse (xxii. 3). But not only shall the dark and sad things of earth be taken away for ever, the best and brightest things of earth shall be extinguished in that glory as a candle in the blaze of daylight. No sun—for the glory of God shall be the light; no temple—for all is temple there, where God is, and Christ. As the Church, so her eternal dwelling-place; as the dwelling-place, so the Church. May each and all of us have our portion in that Church; in her conflict now, and in her glory hereafter, through Christ, her living Head.



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